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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH

MRS. VERONA A. CLARKE

(With Ms. Bobbi Jean Clarke)

August 11 and 14, 1997

Huntington, West Virginia

Interviewers: Rita Wicks-Nelson, Ph.D. and Ancella Radford Bickley, Ed.D.

Transcriptionist: Gina Kehali Kates

RW-N: It's August 10th, 1997. [Correction: Date is 8/11/97] We're in the home of Verona Clarke in Huntington, West Virginia, uh, Ancella Bickley and Rita Wicks-Nelson. Okay, we can begin. Sometimes we find it, uh, we have found that people tell us it's easier if they kind of begin at the beginning, so... (VC: Yeah) let's open by...will you tell us where you were born, when you were born, and a little bit about your family background?

VC: I would like, I would like for you to uh, put the home of Verona and, and Bobbie Jean Clarke.

RW-N: The home of Verona (VC: and Bobbie Jean Clarke) Clarke and Bobbie Jean Clarke in Huntington, West Virginia. [VC's voice in background is inaudible] And Bobbie Jean Clarke is Verona's daughter. And she is sitting in on the interview, and we will probably hear from her from time to time. (BJC: That's all right; that's good.) Mrs. Clarke, can you tell us where you born, and when you were born, and about your family background?

VC: Well, I was born in Anderson, South Carolina (RW-N: Would you spell that for us?) Anderson. (RW-N: Anderson) A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n, South Carolina. I was born in 1910. That's the best language I have.

RW-N: What month was that when you were born? February the 15th, 1910. Uh, we, we, uh, when my mother and father both were living together then. And we, uh, I have two sisters. I'm the oldest of the two sisters. One Minnie, Minnie Lee, uh, Acker, that my daddy was named. He always used the term PC Acker (RW-N: And that's A-c-k-e-r?) A-c-k-e-r. And uh, as, as uh, I was about to say that uh, during some kind of turmoil-, you remember when a lot of people were leaving the south, going to north (RW-N: Yes) and a lot of men would claim they uh, but they would go, they would never come back. They would always claim that uh something else

happened. My daddy came to West Virginia; we didn't know where he was for a long time. In the meantime, the parents, my parents was separated from one another, and there was no connection. Uh, my mother married again, and she moved to North Carolina—from Anderson, South Carolina, to Wilson, North Carolina. And there she met uh, a man that had four children. She married so that this man, and help him raise his four children. And uh, but only the two, two of us, my youngest sister and myself, uh, went with my mother. But my sister, the middle-aged one, uh, stayed with Grandma and Grandpa. They were Blues, Joseph Blue and Ella Blue was their names. But anyway, and when my mother married again, she married a man as I said had four children. And uh, well, my mother came to South Carolina to Wils-, no, to uh, Anderson, South Carolina, and carried us to Wilson, North Carolina. He had four children. And there were just two us, because Grandma wouldn't let Minnie come; Minnie was the middle sister. And uh, and as time went on, my mother, as I said, she helped my step-daddy, his name is George Edwards, and she insisted on us taking the name of Edwards. And I was old enough to not to want to but she was set, I guess he coaxed her in. I have two sets of, you know, names like that. It's, it's strange how things happen. And, and I do believe they happen for the best. Maybe there was a reason, you know, a reason. And as time went on, as I said, I came to uh, uh, my daddy was living in Williamson, West Virginia. And he wanted me to come and visit him. Well, my other two sisters didn't particularly want to come, but I came on to visit my-, because he said. I was wanting to know could I go to school, and he said, "Yes." I said, "I want to go to college, but my step-daddy says, "Oh, you don't need to..." you know, that kind of a person that didn't want progress, I guess. But uh, he was a pretty good person, but "I did all right and I didn't have an education," something like that. And of course, Ma, Ma always said, "You use good sense,

you do what you want to do.” She just told me to do that. So, I told my daddy I was coming out to visit him. My intention was to stay, but he thought I was just coming to visit.

AB: How old were you at that time?

VC: Let’s see, how old...because I was in uh, I was in the ninth grade. (BJC: And it was 1927, wasn’t it?) Yeah, 1927.

BJC: You said it was 1907. You were 17.

VC: Yeah, uh-huh, but anyway, it was that time when I came to.... And I...so when I came out, the first thing I wanted to do-, my intentions was coming to stay, but he just thought I was coming to visit. He had married again. And the lady that he married, she had a son named Dan, Dan, Dan, and she, I think her reason for marrying my daddy because, see, he wasn’t that good a husband, I didn’t think [chuckles]...I didn’t think he was a good husband for my mom, and I didn’t think.... But anyway, Miss Lizzie was very, uh, any mother would be for her son. And he was smart, and she wanted him to go to school. And uh, so, she took everything that could be taken, I guess, from a man, to keep the family together. So I wanted, I wanted to go to school, too, and I wanted to do what Dan did, I wanted to do just as well as Dan. I finished high school the year that Dan finished college. But Dan, and Dan wasn’t that much older but his mother always saw that he got, you know, to school. And so, Dan went to West Virginia State. And I went to, when I finished, I finished in ‘31, and he finished college in ‘31. I finished high school in Williamson.

AB: So, when you came to Williamson, you enrolled at Liberty High School? (VC: At Liberty High School) Do you remember how big Liberty was, uh, at that time?

VC: Pretty big up there on that hill. They, they enlarged it, though, after I was, after I was there.

Because after I finished high school there, so I went to Bluefield. When I finished high school there, I, I went to Bluefield. And then, it so happened they were opening up the schools and making them a little larger and they put a home ec department in there. And I was the first real home ec teacher. They had had some subjects, you know, but I was the first uh, home ec teacher for Liberty High School.

AB: Could we go back for a moment to uh, when you went to Williamson, where did your dad work? Was he a miner?

VC: No, my dad had a good business of cleaning shop. He had presses and cleaning shop. He had it on the corner of Mark Russell and, and 4th Avenue; I think that was the street that went through town, the highway part of it, that went through over on the north side of the railroad tracks.

AB: Did you work in, in the shop at all?

VC: No, I didn't. I used to, uh, I didn't work in the shop. But one of the things I would do sometimes, I would go down and stay while my dad was gone to collect uh, collect and take clothes out and something like that. And that's all, I never did work as a hired person, that was the only thing about it, because I was school age.

AB: Where did you live in Williamson?

VC: Uh...my daddy was living, what was that street named right behind that street was at the grade school there in Williamson? But uh, then...

AB: Did he own his own house, (VC: Who?) your dad, or did he rent or what?

VC: No, he rent. But he had a pressing shop that was on Mark Russell corner, I remember that.

But then,

^ however, uh, when I went to uh, Williamson, my intention was to finish high school. And

[inaudible] I wanted to go to college. So, when I uh, I went to Williamson and I graduated...what year was that I graduated from Williamson High School? (BJC: Not from, not from...from Liberty High School) Liberty High School. (BJC: And you said you finished high school the year 1931, and Dan finished college.)

VC: In 1931, that's right. And then when I...I made application to go to-, I didn't feel like I could go but they were letting you work your way at Bluefield State. So, I made application. I said, "I'll just make it, I might get a chance." I just took hunches, you know. And uh, and so, I went on, I got ready and went on. And when I got there, you had to have a certain amount of money or something and I said, "Well, I'll go back home." But I remember so well, Miss Sims said, "No, Verona, you don't go back home." She said, "I've been watching you. You stay. I'll make a way for you."

RW-N: Who is this now?

VC: Mrs. Sims, whose husband was the president, and she taught school there. Uh, uh, what was...Professor Sims.

RW-N: Now, is that S-i- (AB: -m-m-s) m-m-s. [Correct spelling is Sims]

VC: And uh, but she wouldn't let me, Miss Sims took an interest in me, and she saw that I got job and she saw that I got a job out in town. And so she said, "I've never let anybody else do this. But I trust you, Verona. You go out there and you come on back." [laughing] And I did. She made all kind of [inaudible] to keep me there. And I worked out in town and stayed in the dormitory.

RW-N: What kind of work did you do?

VC: Uh, I just, I stayed with a family, they were Phillips, Roy Phillips. They had just one little

daughter and they wanted somebody to stay in on the, so they could go in summer, I think. And that's how, I stayed with the Phillips there, Roy Phillips.

RW-N: So, you-, did you actually live with the Phillips family then?

VC: After a while I stayed...(RW-N: After a while) uh-huh, I stayed with them altogether for a while. Like Miss Sims said, "Now, Verona, I'm letting you go out, and this is something that's against regulation, but you come back and don't you do it." (RW-N: Uh-huh, I see) And I said, "Oh yeah, I'll do it," you know. She took an interest in me. Until they moved out, out west, uh, South Bluefield in order for me to stay with them. So, I stayed with them, and went to school. And I finished in uh, what was it, '35? (BJC: '35) Yeah. I finished school in '35, and I had a job in Williamson when I came out. They were starting the home ec department there.

RW-N: When you finished in Bluefield, you had a what, Bachelor of... (VC: BS)..a BS in (VC: economics, home economics) home economics, and teacher education, right?

VC: Right, mmm-hmm, yeah, that's what I finished in.

AB: So, when you went to uh, to Liberty, you were essentially beginning the home ec department?

VC: Yeah, they were just putting it in. That's how I, that's how I got in.

AB: So, did you have to-, did you get to choose the equipment and, and all of that, or...?

VC: No, I had-, I'm the biggest improviser and it did-, you know, [chuckles] cause I had to improvise, because I had to run a ho-, a cafeteria, I had to run a cafeteria and teach classes too. And uh, it just so happened that, see, since I finished high school there and then went back teaching there, they all knew me, you know, the kids knew me. And I thought that a lot of kids were pretty near my age then, and, and uh, so, it, it made things [inaudible] for me. And I

remember there was a Miss Starcher, in, in the state, who would come around, and I complained about we needed equipment. I never forget Miss Starcher said, "You keep on that improvising, you don't need that." And I thought that was very—not want us to progress, it seemed like she didn't want to see us progress. But anyway, we worked at it. And, of course, they finally, I, I-, this little building was separate from where-, the main building. But after so long a time, they put me in, we had a place over in.... And I taught there. (BJC: Eight years) I taught eight years. And uh, then I, I didn't work but one year after I married. And, of course, after Bobbie Jean came I never did go back to work.

AB: Who was the principal when you went to, uh, to work there?

VC: Mr. Sawyer. He was the principal when I finished high school there, and when I, I went four years and came back, and he was still the principal. What was Mr. Sawyer's name? Oh, he was precious, too. Oh, he was such a good man. He was a preacher, too, cause he has a daughter was name; her name was [inaudible]. (AB: Mmm-hmm) But uh, that's where I finished and then I finished at Bluefield, had the job when I came out. They were just starting the home ec department, and boy, I had to improvise. And run the cafeteria, too.

AB: Uh, did you have to plan the meals?

VC: Yeah, I had to plan the meals. And then Miss Starcher used to come there to see, and then I did, I had them ahead of time. And it went over well for improvising, because it was different from the-, it was two room over, you know, it wasn't a brick-; the other brick part of the high school's across there. But finally they moved over to the-, after they built the home ec department - pretty good - but I didn't work but a year after they moved over there. (AB: Mmm-hmm) But I used to have to run the cafeteria, put that food out on a long table and the girls that

was take-, and they got a chance to practice [inaudible]. And they thought I could cook, too. [chuckles] And I've been given the name of being a good cook. And I just remember how my mother, my mother was good, and I could remember the different things that she did, and I tried the.... I remember, because we thought my mother was the best cook in the world. And she, you know, she got her cooking from working in people's kitchens. And she, she had worked for some rich people, and she's had it pretty good. So, that was my first start as a home ec major, and I taught at Liberty High School. (AB: Mmm-hmm) Now I was the first, I think. There were two people up for that job. I was still in school. Lilly, Lilly Jackson Perkins, I don't know which one she used, but the Reverend Perkins helped raise Lilly. And we finished high school the same time. She went to Virginia State, I went to West uh, Bluefield, in the state. And that was the only reason why she didn't get the job. I finished in state, and she finished out of state. We both were up for the job at the same time.

AB: How did you hear that there was going^{to} be a job opening? (VC: How did I hear?) Un-huh, how did you know?

VC: I...how did I know? Now really—oh, someone told me, said, "Put in your application anyhow, just go ahead and put it in." I said, "Oh, I don't wanna go back down there." I didn't want to go back to Williamson. They said, "Go ahead and put it in there anyway." So, I did. And it was Mr. Sawyer, Mr. Sawyer insisted I do it. He said, "You're not as good as you think you are, but you sure are good." [laughing] He would say. And somehow, they were interested in me, because I guess because they could see the struggle of trying to, to get an education, I think that's what they saw in me. And I was very fortunate. And being a home ec teacher, here comes the man after he lost his wife, here he comes, uh, I think he had eaten out so much, he just

wanted somebody to cook for him. [laughing] And that's how, after Madie—Madie didn't live long after they married. And then, she died from childbirth. So, that's how it happened.

AB: And what about your father? What happened with him?

VC: My, my daddy uh, he kept a pressing shop for so long, and he did well. But he finally, now, let me see, what happened? Dan finished, Dan finished West Virginia State the same time that I finished Liberty High School. But I went on—and Dan taught—the three of us taught. The lady he married was my teacher when I was in high school. Uh, [name inaudible], what was it, Mary Louise [name inaudible] was her name. We called her Peet behind her back. [inaudible] But somehow, Dan finished West Virginia State. And I don't know how....

AB: Now was this Dan Palmer?

VC: Dan Acker. (AB: Dan Acker) There was Dan-, big Dan, the tall Dan, Dan Palmer, and little Dan. And Dan just died here recently. I have a, I have a clipping of him. He married Miss [name inaudible], the woman that taught at, at Liberty. And they had three children.

AB: So your father continued to run the cleaning and pressing shop?

VC: Oh, no, uh, no, he didn't, he didn't continue that because he worked for-, finally after he didn't keep his business going, he would work for the different shops. Then he would still take clothes away and carry them to different place and get 'em pressed. He just kept working like that for a long time. (AB: Mmm-hmm) But at one time there was-, I taught home ec there, and Dan Acker taught uh, chemistry, and uh, and Peet taught English; all three of-, there were three Ackers there at one time, teaching, at Liberty High School.

AB: Did you feel that the equipment of the school, chemistry and what not, was adequate for the students?

VC: No. Uh, Dan, Dan, Dan Acker worked hard at trying to get that when they added that new addition, add the new addition to the main building, for the home ec department, one for the chemistry department. Dan was right across the hall from me and I was across the hall from them. But after I was married, I didn't go back, after Bobbie Jean was born, I didn't go back teaching.

AB: How did you compare, uh, your experience in Williamson with Anderson, South Carolina, in terms of the school, availability of the school?

VC: Oh, I didn't know too much about South Carolina. The only thing I just went to school there for a little while.

RW-N: How old were you when you moved to uh, to Wilson?

VC: My married-, my mother married again. And that's where she ended up. Well, she went to Wilson to work; she had uh, uh, uh uncle there. And then she met a man that had four children, and she had three. But one of my sisters stayed with my grandmother. She never would let Minnie go with the rest-, Willie and myself. And uh, so that's how. I guess, I don't remember exactly how old...I think I was around twelve. Because uh, this fellow that uh, the reason why I came to West Virginia, was the reason because uh, my stepfather, and my mother called him Mr. George—he was a Edwards—he just didn't believe...“I'm, I'm doing all right, and I didn't have no education,” you know. [chuckle] But I wanted to. And so I, I, that's how I just insisted that I was, I was gonna be somebody. You know how children say, “Yeah, I'm gonna be somebody, I'm can be somebody.”

RW-N: You mentioned a few times the word progress. (VC: Huh?) You used the word progress a few times (VC: Uh-huh) in talking with us. And evidently, you were young when you

wanted some progress for yourself. (VC: mmm-hmm) Where do you think that came from? All kids don't see the world that way.

VC: Well, uh, I think it's because uh, my mother. My mother, she, she believed in education. And, and because, when she married this man in Wilson—he had four children—he didn't want those kids to go to school. And she sent hers to school. Said, "I'm not going to send—my children are going to school, and I'm not going to send my children to school and your children stay home." She just [inaudible] and made us all go to school together. We were out in the country, not far, because we could walk from the school a lot of time. But he, he was kind of progressive. But anyway, that's how.... And she made him let those children go to school. You know how some of them say—"I didn't have an education, I did all right," you know. [chuckles] But, uh, she saw that they went to school long as they want to. But when I came out here, some of them were still going to school. Because when I came out to visit my daddy, he thought I was just gonna-, and I had made up my mind I was gonna stay. I asked him, you know, could I go to college, and he said, "Yeah, you can go. You can work your way up here in, in college." And that inspired me. So he thought I was coming to visit, and I meant to come to stay.

AB: What kind of work did your stepfather do?

VC: Uh, it was a farm...(AB: A farmer?) mmm-hmm, he was a farmer.

AB: Did your mother help out in the, in the...(VC: Yes)...with the crops and what not? (VC: And she helped raised his children, yeah.) Did you work on the farm yourself? (VC: Oh, yeah, yeah) What did you do?

VC: You know...I've been a good worker. I used to-, let me tell you what I used to do. Don't tell nobody. [chuckles] We raised tobacco. It was out on the farm, it wasn't far out. It was a

very pretty little farm, because I've carried Bobbie Jean out there to see it. Uh, I could do anything that I set my mind to. I used to sit upon that big old keg where the water, and the men sat back there, and they set out the tobacco. You never seen that happen. But I [inaudible] in rows, and you had to kind of—the mules—anything that I wanted to do, I'd just go ahead and try to do it.

AB: So, you drove the mule?

VC: I drove the thing sitting up on that big long, that keg that had the water in it, to pump the water, that would go down as the men would set out the tobacco. I did that. Whatever I had, whatever come to me, I just tried to do it, and I did it. Because I prayed, I really-, that's how I know God answers prayer.

AB: Did you pray for something special in those days?

VC: Oh, yes, sure did.

AB: Did you pray that you wanted to get away from the farm? [laughter]

VC: I sure did. Prayed it, yes, I did. Yeah. It's what you set your mind to do. And prayer, I do it.

AB: So did you spend long hours then, out in the field working with that tobacco? [inaudible]

VC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I used to sit up on that big keg and drive the mules. They had mules back then, in that time. It's, it's, it's strange, how all this comes back to me, that I forget about some of the things that I've forgotten about.

AB: And did you have to work in the house, too? I mean, were there chores that you had to do?

VC: Oh, yeah, yeah.

AB: What did you have to do?

VC: Well, uh, there-, he had some chores, too, Ozie and myself worked together most of the time. We even washed the dishes together. We cleaned up different things that we had to do. We had our different jobs. And uh, but there was one-, my sister didn't uh, Grandma kept Minnie, but Willie was there. And we all three are living. I'm hoping to see them this fall. Minnie lives in Wilson, North Carolina, she's still there. Willie's in Baltimore. And I'm here. We all three have been here. Has Minnie been here?

BJC: They all have been here. But most of all, she-, now this, this is something that she hasn't said. This is something that Mother says, and I say every day. Mother should have been a cosmetologist. [VC chuckles] She loves to fool with hair. And now, see, even when she was fooling with mine, cause she was the one who took good care of it, and always has. And I still take good care of it, too. But I do have better than average hair. But most of all, one thing you've always said. You said that Minnie Lee and (VC: Willie?) Willie; no, not Willie. Uh, one of Mr. George's kids, (VC: Adele) Adele, would switch jobs with her, so she would do their hair. (VC: Yeah, yeah) And that's one thing she'll talk about.

VC: Yeah. They had pretty hair. Yeah I did, I did like-, like I said, I just, I just whatever I set my mind to do, I tried to do it. I'd just go ahead and try it and I would do it.

AB: You spoke about, uh, prayer. Was church an important part of your life (VC: Yeah) when you were growing up?

VC: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, my grandma, Grandma Blue; she was very fair. Grandpa was real dark. But Grandma Blue, she thought a lot of me. She, because I would try to do everything she'd do, I would imitate her. And even when I used to see her go and spread her leg out and urinate, you know, old people did that had long dresses, and I would try to do that, too. [laughing] Oh, yeah,

is, is-, you're bringing back a whole lot of things I forgot about.

AB: So, did-, was the church in your community or did you all have to drive or travel or walk far or so to go to church?

VC: Sometime we did. After my mother married again [inaudible]. But Grandma, Grandma used to-, I used to go to Grandma, and when Grandma would go up to the mourner's bench, I'd want to go up there, too.

AB: What kind of church was it? Baptist church or...? (VC: Yeah, I guess so) Do you remember the name of it? (VC: Un-un) Tell me about the mourner's bench, what was that?

VC: They would, they would ask people who's interested in wantin' to be saved, would come up to the mourner's bench. And I would go up there, I was small, and I would go up there and Grandma used to go, "You don't need it," and I said, "I want to be up here with you." I would say anything to just, you know, coax her, being with her.

RW-N: So, when you were growing up, you really-, you had, you had, first of all, you had a life in South Carolina, then you had a life in North Carolina, right? (VC: Mmm-hmm) Can you divide that up for me for a minute, so I can get a better picture of what, of what each one of those lives were like? When you were in South Carolina, your daddy left, at some time, right? (VC: Mmm-hmm) And there were three girls in the family? (VC: Yes) Uh, you were the middle one? No, you weren't the middle one. (VC: I was the oldest one) You were the oldest one. Then came...(VC: Minnie was the next) Minnie was the next. How much, how many years were there between you and Minnie?

VC: Minnie; we were real close, all three were close.

RW-N: You were very close (VC: Uh-huh) And then, and then came Willie? (VC: Yeah, Willie

was the...) And which one stayed behind in South Carolina? (VC: Uh, Minnie) [tape recorder beeping] Minnie stayed behind, okay. So you went with Willie, then. Okay, in South Carolina, then, uh, do you recall when your father left or were you very young?

VC: No, uh...I think I was very young (RW-N: Yes) cause when my father left he was working in Anderson, South Carolina, he was working in some kind of brogan mill and uh... (RW-N: I'm sorry, what kind of mill?) Brogan mill, it was a cotton mill. (RW-N: A cotton mill) They, they took cotton and made materials and all of that, because we'd get scraps and stuff. And uh, he was something like a janitor, I guess, [inaudible]. And something happened there. A lot of people were leaving, leaving the south, going north or whatever, (RW-N: Yes, mmm-hmm) to leave, and I think he just wanted an excuse to leave. (RW-N: Yes) Uh, uh, he claimed that something happened down there that he had to leave. And that's the way he got away. You know, I thought it was true what he said but after I look back at it, and I got grown enough to look at it, I thought he was just like everybody, he was trying to get away, too.

AB: But now, when your father left, the family was together? (VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm) And he left and left his wife and three children behind? (VC: Mmm-hmm) And they stayed with... (VC: Grandma) With your mother's mother? (VC: Uh-huh) And until you decided that you were going to go find him? (VC: My daddy, mmm-hmm. I kept up with...) Well, how did you keep in contact with him during those years?

VC: Oh, oh, well, somehow he came down to see us once in Wilson.

RW-N: Now, that's in Wilson already? That's after you had moved, right?

VC: That was after I left South Carolina, Anderson. (AB: Mmm-hmm) But he came down to see us once. And then he gave me the address and told me to write him. And, uh, then I finally

wrote him and told him that I was coming, I wanted to come to see him. I was coming to stay, but he thought I....and I stayed. And that's when Dan-, Dan was, Dan was, uh, in college, I believe. Because I said when I went to-, when I finished high school, Dan finished college.

RW-N: So during the time that you were in Anderson, you did not have contact with your father?

VC: Well, I, I can remember, yes, my father...(RW-N: Even then you had some) Yeah, uh-huh. Because we lived at, we lived-, he was something like the janitor of this brogan mill, that's a cotton mill.

RW-N: But after he left, you didn't have much contact with him until later on?

VC: No, No, we went on and stayed with Grandma. (RW-N: Yes) And that was in Anderson. And my mother came to Wilson, cause she had an uncle there. And they told-, he had gotten a good job, she was working for families, you know. And stayed on [inaudible]. And then finally when she got-, she met this man that had these children and she married him. Finally, she came home and got uh—but Minnie, Grandma and them wouldn't let Minnie come—Willie and myself came with her to North Carolina.

RW-N: And when you lived with your grandmother, was a grandfather in the house there, too?

VC: Yes, Grandfather Blue.

RW-N: Can you tell us a little bit more about your grandmother and grandfather?

VC: Oh, Grandma and Grandpa, they were from, I think they were from, really, from Georgia, Augusta, Georgia. Somebody came from Augusta, Georgia. And of course, they, they...

END TAPE 1 - SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1 - SIDE 2

AB: . . .so, I'm curious to know if there was any slavery in your family. Did you ever hear any

stories about uh, about that, about anybody that might have been a slave?

VC: My, my, my grandpa Blue's father, when I was just a little girl, I can remember he came to visit us. His, he was a Blue. And uh, and he talked like-, he was from Augusta, Georgia. And he would get us and start telling us something. "I was a slave," he said he was a slave. But Grandpa, my Grandpa, was never a slave. But Grandpa Blue, he was a Blue. And he talked like this: "And de-." Yes, he said he was a slave. And he talked like he was a bad one too.

AB: Do you remember any stories that he told you?

VC: Yeah!

AB: Okay, tell us, would you?

VC: Once he was, he was on this horse getting away, you know, they were, they would run away whenever they got a chance. And some how he had a gun, he said. And uh, they would shoot those slaves. Now, he told us and I'm not joking—I didn't read this. And he-, they would shoot those slaves if they'd catch 'em trying to get away. And he would say he was getting away on this horse. And uh, and uh, he had a gun. And he said they had what they called uh, who was slave hunters, look for 'em. And he knew when they—he knew all the things that he [inaudible]. And I heard him with my own ears. "And de-, I was on my horse and I had my gun and I didn't keep my eyes off until I got out of his sight." Yeah, they ran away. And he told me how. And he said like-, instead of saying "the" he said "de,"—"de so and so." I remember sitting down, just listening to him, I just loved to hear him tell those things. Now, I was old enough to have sense enough to know what it was all about.

AB: And you said that your grandmother was very fair skinned? (VC: Mmm-hmm, she was white) Which means there was some white relatives in the family?

VC: I guess so. I didn't, I didn't, uh, because she was the only one in her family. Now, her mother was the one that was white, I think, she said. I've got a picture of Grandma—go get Grandma's picture, would you? [request to BJC]

BJC: In the, in the guest bedroom?

VC: Uh-huh. See if you can find it.

AB: So, so your, your grandmother's mother was a white woman? (VC: Yes, mmm-hmm) And, but her father was black?

VC: Black. But now, hers came, not her—that ain't the way it was. Grandma's mother was the one that was white. But she had Grandma by one of the slaves, run away slave. But Grandma said that she was not that—it was someone else in the family who was her daddy, and that she was not-, no, she had no white blood in her. And that picture will show you she didn't have any. But some things they kept to themselves, Grandma told me. But she was a doll.

RW-N: Tell us more about her.

VC: Oh, she was, she was-, Bobbie Jean's getting her picture, I don't think I have it up there at all. She was-, and she just loved us, because we were her little black grandchildren. And Grandpa was real dark and, you know, he had this moustache, and would twist it up. And he thought he was good-looking. [chuckles] But I can remember all that crazy stuff.

AB: Did she, did she ever tell you how she met your grandfather, how they happened to...(VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm) Would you tell us that, please?

VC: Well, she said that uh, the slaves, see, how she came along...back then, men would carry them out, ride them out. And the women, they became good friends. And these things were secret [inaudible]. Now she was begotten with a white mother, and a black grandma. That way

she was. Then, when she got older, she married her a black man, too. That was Grandpa. And then she raised-, she was a mother of eight children. Uncle Joe Blue just died, uh, was it last year that we went to Uncle Joe Blue? Oh, he lived to 102. Bobbie Jean and myself went down to the funeral. Uncle Joe Blue was the last one; that was the son. That's Grandma.

RW-N: We're now looking at pictures of Grandma, in South Carolina.

VC: Mmm-hmm.

AB: And this picture is uh...her last name was Blue. What was her first name?

VC: Ella.

AB: Ella Blue.

RW-N: And Blue is B-l-u-e, like the color blue?

VC: Uh-huh, just plain Blue. Her, her oldest son, I told you-, was it last year or year before last, we went to Uncle Joe's funeral?

BJC: I think it was last-, year before last, I think.

VC: By now. [chuckles] But anyway, we went there. And this picture, this is the three of us.

This is me, this is Minnie Lee, and this is Willie. We all three are still living. I plan, I plan to try to get down there this fall.

RW-N: We're looking at a wonderful picture of these three sisters.

VC: Mmm-hmm, three sisters. And we all three are still living.

RW-N: Uh-huh, they're all still living. And you say they live in diff-, your sisters live in different states now?

VC: Uh-huh. Minnie's still in—we're, we're trying to get down to Wilson, to see Minnie. And uh, that's Grandma. I got that, uh, just had that enlarged. You see I'm a great picture lover. See

all those pictures?

RW-N: Yes, there's lots of pictures around this room. So you felt a lot of love from these grandparents?

VC: Oh, yeah, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Your dad was gone, your father was gone, but your mom was there, and grandparents who clearly loved you.

VC: Mmm-hmm, Grandma loved us to death.

RW-N: And during that time, uh, was your mother working outside to earn money?

VC: That was when she came—her uncle-. That was in Anderson now. (RW-N: Yes) But she, she came to Wilson, North Carolina. Her uncle got her up there to work. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And then she, she met a man up there who had four children, she married him, then she came and got us. But Willie and myself-, but Minnie, Grandma and them wouldn't let Minnie go.

RW-N: How did you feel about leaving and moving away?

VC: I liked it. [chuckles]

RW-N: You liked it?

VC: Yeah.

RW-N: So, even though you loved your grandparents, you didn't mind leaving? (VC: No, no) You were ready to go...

VC: Yeah, I was glad to go.

RW-N: ...to be with Mom. And when you moved, then, to North Carolina, uh, you moved with Willie, your sister, and then you moved into a house where there were four new children, right?

VC: That was...

RW-N: ...your stepfather's children.

VC: Yeah, my mother married, I tell you; my mother was Eliza, was her name. Willie was one of the sister's names.

RW-N: Yes, okay. And your mother was Eliza?

VC: Her name was Eliza. (RW-N: Eliza) Eliza Blue.

RW-N: Yes, and she had, she had been born where? Had she been born in, uh, North Caro-, South Carolina?

VC: I think she was born in South Carolina. One-, Aunt Roxy was the only one was born in Georgia.

RW-N: Can you tell us a little bit more about your mother?

VC: My mother? Oh, don't I have something beautiful about Mom? Bob, show them Mom's pictures.

RW-N: Tell us the whole story about your mother.

VC: Well, my mother was the oldest, oldest of the, of my grandma and grandpa children. (RW-N: Uh-huh) Uh, she-, and Uncle Joe was next in order. Uncle Joe was the one just, we went to his funeral. (RW-N: He just died, uh-huh.) Uh, and then Uncle Claude. And Uncle Claude was living in uh, in uh, in Florida. I went to see Uncle Claude. What part? Was it Jacksonville, Florida, Uncle Claude was living?

BJC: This is a real good picture of Grandma.

RW-N: We're now looking at pictures of... ?

VC: Of Ma? (BJC: Yeah) There she is, she is, there's my momma.

AB: This is Mrs. Clarke's mother that we are looking at. Uh, she seems to be sitting-, is that a

wheelchair?

VC: Yes. She lost-, she was living with me. She died with me. She, she was a diabetic. And she lost a leg and finally she lost both legs, and she died then. And she's buried up in Williamson. She's buried in Williamson.

RW-N: And how old was she when she died?

VC: How old was Ma? Was she 86?

BJC: Eighty-six, that's right.

VC: Yeah, 86.

RW-N: Uh-huh. So you have relatives who live a long time?

VC: Mmm-hmm, yeah, mmm-hmm, yeah.

RW-N: In the family.

AB: Well, your mother is smiling in this picture. She, uh, she looks like she was very happy.

VC: Uh, yeah. She had her leg off, that's when she had her leg off. She, she died with me. She came out and stayed with me. I'm gonna say eight years, Mom lived with me eight years. She had dia-, she was a diabetic.

BJC: Well, I thought it was longer than that; I thought it was 13 years.

VC: Maybe it was.

AB: So, as you remember your home life when you were growing up, uh, was it a happy life for you?

VC: Yes, most of the time, because, uh, Ma always saw that we went to Sunday School and church. You didn't get to wear certain clothes unless you go to church. [chuckles] That was a tactic, and you would like to put all those clothes and switch. [chuckles]

AB: Did your mother sew for you? How did you uh, afford to uh, to have clothes, church clothes?

VC: Most, most-, that's why I got the-, that I had-, Ma used to make us clothes, but I didn't like them. As soon as I could, I started trying to make my own clothes. But anyway....

RW-N: And did you learn to sew?

VC: Yeah. I took home economics, see. And I....

BJC: Yeah, she made clothes for me.

VC: Yeah.

BJC: And I still have one or two that she made for me.

RW-N: And, and do you feel like she felt, that you'd rather make your own clothes?

BJC: No, I wasn't that wicked. [all laughing]

AB: So when...when you were growing up, did you feel at all deprived? Did you feel like there were things that you didn't have that you wanted to have?

VC: No. But my ma always tried to get us-, because she was the, you know, you didn't get to wear certain clothes unless you went to church, and that's how you wanted to go to church, see, you wanted to wear your clothes. And then we would be in Krogers and things, and we had good chances. And my mother always, like she always used to curl my hair on a back of anything, we wore those long curls, you know. And uh, she had to, sometimes she would put three up here and you'd tie a bow on those three and the others dropped down and you had [inaudible], those curls a long time ago. She just learned that she would round up a stick or anything and pull it out, you got your curls. My hair was just a little different from Minnie and Willie's, but, Willie, Willie, now, Willie, I talked with Willie the other—Minnie, we plan to go down and see Minnie this

month if we can. It might be the first of September, won't it now. [directed to BJC] Uh-huh.

AB: Well, when you went to visit-, I mean, when your mother married and now there are four new children for you to have to learn to get along with....

VC: We got along good, too.

AB: Was there any problem in putting those two families together?

VC: I don't think it was too much a problem. And after we got-, we would get, uh, as we got older it was more because, now his oldest son was Ozie. Grandma never did let Minnie stay with us. Minnie wasn't raised with us after we got there. Grandma kept Minnie. But uh, no, we, we got along good. Ozie and myself, we had chores. We worked together in cleaning the dishes and cleaning, keeping this part, we had certain jobs we do, that was your job. And sometimes we would work together and do them together. Sometime we would separate and you do this part and I'll do this part, see, and then things like that. And each person had a job. Mom taught us all, we had a, had a job, and we had to do that. Minnie uh, uh, Willie and [name inaudible] washed the dishes. And they soak everything, they put them on the stove and-, you know what soaking is-, put water in the pan so you wouldn't have to wash, and get ready for the pan, you had to go get it and wash it out. [laughing] That's funny; you're making me remember a lot of things I forgot. [laughing] Oh, yeah.

AB: Uh, what about-, could your grandmother and grandfather-, did they-, were they-, have much education?

VC: No, Grandma was smart. I often wondered how did she....she, she, she was, she could, she would save her butter; she always had cows and a pig and everything, and she sold, she had-, she was a business woman. She had things that she had regular customers; every Saturday she would

take them there, that she knew how much money she was supposed to get for everything. I don't know how she knew how to count, but you couldn't cheat her. She didn't have any education; she was smart, she was smart.

AB: So, she didn't have much formal education (VC: That's right), but she understood how to manage. (VC: Yeah, yeah) And what about your grandfather? Did he have uh, have much in the way of formal education?

VC: No, Grandpa didn't. But she saw that most of her children—my mother was the oldest girl, and Uncle Joe, who I said just lived to be a hundred and two, and he was, he was smart, too. But all those kids were pretty smart.

AB: Did they get a chance to go to school? Did your mother get a chance to go to school?

VC: No more than high school. No, no, no.

AB: Uh-huh. Did she finish high school?

VC: No, I don't think so, un-un. Now, but she-, her baby brother, [name inaudible] his name was Frederick and we called him [name inaudible]; I don't know how we got that. But anyway, uh, he finished college. And he taught uh, he went to a place down in North Carolina; was the name of that school. But however, he, he didn't do so much teaching. But he went to Washington—he worked at the capitol—he had a good job in Washington at the capitol. He was close to the president; he could do -. Because when we went up there to see them, and he had his regular job that he did but he kind of—he was ambitious and he was trying to.... And then he married a girl and they had one child.

BJC: Is she still living? What was Joel's...?

VC: Uh, she was out in California the last time I heard anything about it. I guess that gives you

a little idea.

AB: Uh, do you-, what made you want to go to school yourself? Was there somebody in the neighborhood that, that you saw that, uh, was educated herself? What made you what want to go?

VC: I just want-, no, I just wanted to learn. I was ambitious and I just wanted to know what was [inaudible], why this and why-. And you know why I took home economics? I didn't know whether I was gonna get to finish Bluefield. But when I got up there, I had a job. And I worked, and they got me a job working, I was the head cook there one summer, when people went to summer^{school} back then. You remember when they used to go to summer school? Yeah, I was the head cook one summer. (AB: At Bluefield State?) At Bluefield State. And I would have to get up on [inaudible-]. Uh, what was that lawyer's, oh, what's her name? Her husband—Redmond. Do you know Redmond? It's a lawyer used to be there, and his wife, because she's been to Williamson, I've seen. But they would,- and I worked through summer, in summer school, when summer school teachers were coming, you know, people would come up in summer school.

RW-N: Now this was when you were a student yourself?

VC: Well, I was going to school, but I was working my way. (RW-N: Right, yes) When I finished school, they owed me fifty cents. I had worked that much. In the summer, in the summer, I would work like Mr. Dunlap and uh, what were some of the...Mr...oh, the man that was head of the money part. But I had a way of trying to do, to-, I wanted to do. And, and they gave me good jobs and I learned from them. I remember Mr. Dixon was, uh, was the president and he carried me-, got me-, carried me somewhere to work. They did a lot of things. When I remember Miss Sims saying, "Verona, now, you've got to work [inaudible]," said, "don't make me ashamed of you." Say, "Don't just stand on the street and talk to anybody. You come on home." Say, "I've never done this before

for anybody else.” And I didn’t do it. And in the summer, I stayed for summer school and cooked for the teachers that, that stayed. Now, the man that took care of the money, what was his name? I can’t remember. But Mr. Dunlap; Mr. Dixon was the president. I got to be friends with all of them, because I stayed and cooked for ‘em. I even remember uh, some outstanding man who came to Bluefield in the summer, and I prepared his—I can’t remember exactly who it was—but I prepared the meals for ‘em.

AB: Well, now, were you, uh, basing what you did with the food on what you learned at home, or what you were learning at Bluefield State? How did you learn how to cook well enough to manage this?

VC: My mother was a good cook; my mother was a good....

AB: So, you’re using your mother’s, uh,... (VC: Uh-huh) (BJC: Or a combination of them)

VC: Yeah, a combination, I guess you would say, my mother. And then too-, because I was the head cook one summer, in summer school one summer. And I had a lot of friends who wanted special things. You know, you get to be known by that. Then they used to have summer...you remember when they used to have summer school? And I remember Virginia Warren used to come up there with her two children, and went to summer school. And I was up there then.

AB: Mmm-hmm. Uh, so, what made you take home ec at Bluefield? I mean, there were other things you could have chosen. Why’d you choose home ec?

VC: I tell you why. I worked it out. I said, “I don’t know whether I’m gonna get to finish.” I would rather-, you know, you could take two year normal, you know, and get you a job teaching. And ,uh, I started with-, on that, I wanted to take home economics because I said if I didn’t get to finish, I could have something to learn how to live my own self. And then I said, well, if I finish,

home ec and be a good [inaudible] somebody might want me. [chuckles] And even, really, I just thought like that. Somebody might want me. And I said, now, so, I'll go ahead and take this, I'll learn to-, because my mother was a good cook, and I wanted to be it. I think that was one of the things that said, I figured-, I wouldn't have to, I wouldn't have to, the way we said it then, I wouldn't have to work in no white people's kitchen; [chuckling] that's the way I said it. And, and I would be on my own.

AB: When you were in school, uh, was there anybody that was sort of a role model for you? Was there anybody that, that helped you kind of plan what you wanted to do with your life, or so? That you wanted to be like, or who was especially impressive for you?

VC: It wasn't so much of that, as how much people expected of me. They have done things for me and I couldn't make them ashamed of it. That was my idea, that I had to do....

AB: Who were some of those people?

VC: Mrs. Sims. (AB: Mmm-hmm) Miss uh, she was a Miss Smith then, she married Mr. Dunlap. Miss Smith was from Columbus, Ohio. I even went to summer school. She had said, "Verona, come on and go with me to summer school," in 1936. Said, "Come on, you can stay with me, cause I want to go to summer school." This made good friends. She said, "Come on and stay with me." I went to Columbus and stayed with Miss Smith. Miss Smith said, "You won't have to pay a thing. You'd just be somebody-, and I'll have somebody to go, I want to go to summer school."

RW-N: Now, who, was she a teacher?

VC: Yes, she was my home ec teacher at (RW-N: At Bluefield?) Bluefield. But she was from Columbus. And I went to summer school two summers at Ohio State. But she was the reason why. Said, "Come on and stay with me, I ^{don't} want to go to summer school this summer ^{unless} I have somebody

to go with me.” And I stayed with them. And she said, “You won’t have to pay, just stay with me, and we’ll go together.” And that’s why. But she was my home ec teacher.

RW-N: And were there any others, of these people who were-, who had high expectations for you?

VC: Oh, yes, I think that Mrs. Sims. Mrs. Sims...

BJC: But you keeping saying Mrs. Sims, instead of Miss Smith, Miss Smith. Now Miss Smith...

VC: Now Miss Smith, Miss Smith was my home ec teacher. She taught the sewing part.

BJC: But you keep saying that. You keep saying Sims, instead of Smith there.

VC: Mrs. Sims, I meant Mrs. Sims was the president’s wife. Miss Smith was the one hadn’t married anyone, but she finally married Mr. Dunlap. And Mr. Dunlap was a good friend of mine.

AB: Now, when you first went to Bluefield State, Mr. Sims was the president (VC: That’s right), and then Mr. Dickason became president. (VC: Yeah) Were you there when Mr. Dickason became president (VC: Yeah) at Bluefield State? (VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm) So Mrs. Sims also, although she was the president’s wife, she worked at Bluefield State, too? (VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm) Was she like, the Dean of Women or something?

VC: Well, she taught the-, you know, when they used to have those classes, uh, those two year courses the teachers (AB: the normal, mmm-hmm) normal, that’s it, the normal courses. And uh, she taught-, she taught something like the biology cause she would go on, go on those field trips and study different things, even the field trips, even, if you wanted, different kinds of plants and things and different things like that.

AB: So she had faith in you and you felt that you could not let her down?

VC: I guess so, I guess so. But, but she was so. . . . "Now Verona, so-and-so, she was just talking. Now, I don’t want you to stand on the streets.” And then she would tell me how proud she was, and

she made me feel good, too. "You're not supposed to disappoint me," and things like that. And I, I went to her-, I've been to visit, after I married and Bobbie Jean was born, we used to go out there to [inaudible] in Pennsylvania, where she. . . . I've been to her house; went out to see her before she died.

RW-N: What do you think they saw in you that gave them...gave them high expectations for you? They must have seen something in you. (VC: Must have) What do you think they saw? (VC: I don't know) What do you think that was? [VC laughing]

VC: I don't know. Because I was just frank and right straight to the point. And my mother always told me to tell the truth. "Verona, don't you lie to me," she used to say. [chuckles]

RW-N: And you were a hard worker?

BJC: And I think she was a jack-of-all-trades too. (RW-N: Uh-huh)

VC: Yeah, I did anything.

RW-N: Uh-huh. You did anything, you were a hard worker...? (VC: Hard worker, yes) You sound like you were very interested in life. (VC: Yeah, that's right) Did you have a lot of energy?

VC: Yeah. Then I guess I got my husband that same way. I got a good husband. [chuckles]

AB: Before, before you married your husband, uh, when you were still a teenager growing up, what-, did you date? I mean, were there parties or anything like that?

VC: Yeah, I had a boyfriend I was in love with; his name was Richard Wallace. [laughing]

AB: Was that in Williamson?

VC: Yeah, but we both went to Bluefield. He finished-, he finished high school before I did. He went to Bluefield, he tried to make it there. But he didn't, he didn't make it there. But we-, we kind of separated when I came, I come out, I was supposed to try to get him to go, he wouldn't go. I, I

offered to help him.

AB: You mean help him with his lessons and what not?

VC: And help him to stay in, to go to school. I tried to get him to go, but he wouldn't go.

RW-N: You mean, even financially you would (VC: Yeah) have helped him because you were finished. (VC: Mmm-hmm, yeah) So he was your boyfriend for several years? (VC: Yes, mmm-hmm) So this was a serious relationship in your life (VC: Yes, that's right, it was.) when you were a young woman. (VC: Mmm-hmm, yeah)

AB: So in Williamson, did you have house parties or what did you-, when you were a teenager, finishing school, high school there, what was it like?

VC: You know, we used to, you know what, well, we didn't have any parties at home. They didn't do like they used to do in the south, South Carolina, North Carolina and places like that. No, after school, you know, football games and after football games you had parties, back those days. That was only the way you got.... And then you, uh, then I, see and now, I also prepared the food, worked with in-, and even when I finished high school. See, I finished high school and then came back and taught there, see, (AB: Mmm-hmm) same place I taught.

AB: So you had a fairly active social life? (VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm) And dated and had, had this boyfriend and went to school. (VC: Mmm-hmm, yeah) Now when you were at Bluefield State, when you were, you were working and taking, and going to classes, did you have time for a social life at Bluefield State?

VC: Didn't have too much, because, see, I got, when I started working for the people, I had to stay on. I moved out with the Phillips, they, they-, Phillips. They had a Bluefield Shoe Company there. They were the people. They had one daughter, and see, and I would have to go—they wanted me

to stay in the house, so they could go out more, see. And I stayed right there. And after school, I would go to my class and then I'd come back, cause she, Mrs. Phillips would always, "Now, Verona, if you've got to go to something, let me know before time and I won't have-, you won't have to, I won't have to invite-, I want to know before I invite anybody that you're free to go. And I don't want to interfere with you, you have some social life." And they just had one little girl.

RW-N: Now did you just go to all-black schools? (VC: Yeah) Liberty was a black school.

VC: Liberty was a all-black school.

RW-N: And how many teachers were at Liberty? Do you, do you know?

VC: Ms. [name inaudible], Mr. Sawyer, Mr. Joyce, uh, two of the Joyces were there, were there at the same time. Some of them that went-, Harrison Joyce, he used to live here; now, because he was a senior when I, when I was a junior, I guess. But anyway, yes.

RW-N: So there might have been eight or ten or something like that?

VC: What do you mean?

RW-N: Teachers? (VC: Oh, yeah, mmm-hmm) At least that many? (VC: Maybe) Something like that, okay.

AB: Was Liberty one through twelve?

VC: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm. Yeah, I went to the twelfth grade. Because when I came from North Carolina, see, we finished the 11th, in your senior year; the way they had it break up then. I used to know all those, which ones was elementary and so forth.

RW-N: And the family you lived with then, the Phillips, was that a white family?

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm. And I stayed there with them.

RW-N: And you stayed with them?

VC: Uh-huh, and I would go-, I would catch the streetcar. And sometimes they would take me and I would go to school.

AB: How long were you with them? Two years? (VC: I guess...) Two years?

VC: At least two years. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

RW-N: And how did that go? How was that for you?

VC: Fine. They were very, they were very, they just had the one child. I didn't get to go to a lot of things. But she said, "Now, if you want to go to something like Saturday, let me know, so I won't plan anything for th. . ." Because once we had a little conflict over that. Because she uh, uh, said, "Oh, I was figuring that"—I said, she said, "You just let me know in time, and I won't be inviting." And I remember one time that she said, "Now, Verona, I'm having so and so here," that Saturday, "and I'll need you." I said, "But you told, I told you that I was supposed to go," whatever it was. And I said, "Now, I told you." We had a little conflict over that. And uh, because she felt, she said, "Oh well," she felt a little hurt, because, but yet she had promised me. And I said, "Well, I told you in time that I was going to—" I think it was the junior/senior prom, or something. Whatever it was, it was something special like that that I really, and had planned to go, and I had told her that I would be going that Saturday night. They usually tried to have things on Saturday, at that time, in school. And uh, that was the only time that we had-, but they were, they were, as far as they possibly could be, she, she meant well.

RW-N: Now did she, she was out of the home a lot, too, but was she working or was she just doing other things out of the home?

VC: No, they ran the Bluefield Shoe Company.

RW-N: They both-, so she was working with her husband. (VC: Sometime) Sometime. And, and

your job in the house was to, to be with the child. (VC: Yes) And were you doing other kinds of things as well?

VC: Oh, yes, I kept-, oh yes, I would come home and clean up and maybe sometime I would get something ready, starting towards the dinner for the next day. Mostly, she did most of the cooking. And then she was trying to teach me some of the things that she did. She said, "This will help you in your hom ec." [tape recorder beeping]

RW-N: Did you, uh, continue to have any more contact with them after you graduated?

VC: Oh, yes, uh-huh, I went to see the Phillips. And they, oh, let me see....one time, I remember one time, [chuckle] ... she could look so wild when she was [inaudible]. One time, I went out to see her, that was after I finished, and I went to the front door, all that kind of stuff, you know. I had-, I never did pay any attention-, I never did like it. But I went to the front door and she went to the back door, and she come back and said: "Oh, I didn't know where you was." I knew what she meant: "Why you come to my front door?" [inaudible] [AB chuckling] But I knew what I was doing, so..... So, but she always was-, we stayed good friends. They both died, and I don't know whatever happened to Margaret Reiner. Margaret Reiner was married. (AB: That was the daughter that you cared for?) Mmm-hmm, the child I cared for. So, I tried to keep in contact with her. But once, you know, she was telling me, she wanted me to go with her. And I said, "Now, Miss Phillips, we promised that, that I wouldn't be going with you, because I detest, I detest being seen on the street with a white child. I really did.

AB: So she wanted you to go out with her to help take care of the child while she was doing something publicly (VC: Uh-huh, yes, uh-huh) and you didn't like to do that.

VC: I, I didn't want to do that.

RW-N: Because....?

VC: I was just ashamed to do it, because sometime, if you've ever known anything about the South, sometime black girls had white babies. And I didn't want to be classed as that.

RW-N: Oh, so that was. . .okay. (VC: Yes) So, you didn't want anybody thinking the wrong thing.

VC: Yeah. Yeah. [laughing]

RW-N: Well, you know, what you seem to say about this family is that you got along pretty well with them (VC: Yes, I did.) and they treated you pretty well, you stayed in touch. (VC: Yes, we stayed in touch.) But there were still the subtle things of racism going on. (VC: Yes, that's right) About what door you went in and that kind of stuff.

VC: She was-, she liked me, though. Mrs. Phillips, what was her first name? I did know it, I used to know it. And she said, "Oh, Verona."

RW-N: So there was some affection between you, (VC: Yeah, we did. We liked one another) even though there was this general racism (VC: No, no, we didn't have...) in the communities and...

VC: And we would talk openly about those things. (RW-N: Oh, you did?) Oh yeah. We would talk and she would say, "That's the way you feel?" And I'd say, "No, I don't want-," she'd want me to go on vacation, I'd say, "No, I don't want to go on vacation." [chuckling] I didn't want to-, I didn't want to be seen on the street with a white baby. Because a lot of time, see, black girls had white babies of their own.

AB: Where, where was your room? Uh, where did you sleep when you....?

VC: I stayed right across from their bedroom. I stayed upstairs. Because, see, they would be out at night, and I had to sleep up there where, where, look-, nearer the child.

AB: So was it a nice room?

VC: Yes, mmm-hmm. We got along fine. (AB: Uh-huh, and uh...) And we'd talk about this racial thing a lot, and she'd say, "You feel that way, Verona?" And I'd say, "Yeah, I won't be seen. . ." [chuckling] I was just frank. We were both frank with one another. And I could talk anything I wanted to talk with her, just like I'm talking to you. [inaudible]

AB: Did you sit down at the table and eat with her? How did you do your meals?

VC: No, I didn't eat with them. But Margaret Reiner, they wanted-, [chuckling] they had. . .
.Margaret Reiner...

END TAPE 1 - SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2 - SIDE 1

RW-N: It's August 10th, 1997. This is tape two with Mrs. Clarke. [correction: Date is 8/11/97].

AB: One of the things uh, Mrs. Clarke, that I'm a little curious about. You, you said that you went into home economics, you thought you'd take a two-year program because you wanted to be able to work if you had to drop out of school, you wanted to be able to work. (VC: mmm-hmm) Uh, you weren't planning to teach at that point? I mean, was teaching your kind of goal?

VC: I didn't want to teach, un-un, I didn't want to teach.

AB: You didn't want to teach.

VC: But I had to.

AB: Why-, when you say you had to, what do you mean you had to?

VC: Well, to get-, to hold a job in home ec, and then I had to run the cafeteria, I had to do everything. (AB: So that was what was available) And I had to feed the football boys, I had all the extra work, and I never was paid for the extra work, you know.

AB: So you didn't really set out-, your career goal was not to be a teacher. That was just what was

available to you (VC: Mmm-hmm, that's right) when you-.... Did you do student teaching at Bluefield?

VC: Yeah, we did. Over, over at the-, we-, you mean, when you had to get your practice?

AB: When you were in school, uh-huh, do your practice teaching.

VC: Yeah, we went over to...what's the name of the school? (AB: Uh, Genoa) Genoa, uh-huh.

(AB: Genoa school, uh-huh)

VC: Was it the one called Genoa? Yeah, was it Genoa?

AB: Park Central?

VC: No, it was Genoa.

AB: Genoa, Genoa. So, you did-, in home ec?

VC: Yeah, some of, some of it was in home ec. Yes. And who was teaching then? Oh, she was a pretty woman too. I can't remember her name now either, that taught over there. (AB: Mmm-hmm, So then...) See, I stayed there summer and winter, so I got to know Bluefield. I stayed there, because in the summer, you see, I got to the place where I stayed there and worked. I stayed there and worked.

AB: So when you graduated from Bluefield State, did any of your family come to the graduation ceremony?

VC: Yes, my stepmother, Dan's mother, came. That was the only person that came.

AB: Your dad didn't come?

VC: Mmm-mmm. My stepmother came. Dan Acker, I got that pic-, I wonder where's that picture of Dan. He just died.

AB: Mmm-hmm. And uh, did your mother know, uh, at that point, that you were graduating? Had

you been in touch with her? (VC: Oh, my mother?) Uh-huh. She's still in North Carolina at that time?

VC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AB: So she couldn't come to the graduation, but did she know you were graduating?

VC: [Inaudible] Mom did come. Mom was the only one...I believe....I believe my mother did come. Because Miss Lizzie was there, I know. I know my mother came to something at Bluefield when I was there. (AB: Uh-huh) I know Miss Lizzie came when I-, because, and I don't remember them ever meeting one another, so evidently Mom came at some other time. But Mom came to see me, and Miss Lizzie, I remember, she was there for my graduation cause I was saying nobody else came. My-, Dan, now Dan, Dan was a part of helping me. Because after I finished school, and after we taught in the same high school, I paid him. I paid him back. And the lady he married....

AB: You paid him back because he had helped you financially go to school (VC: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm) and so you're repaying that loan. You saw it as a loan.

VC: I repaid the loan. He appreciates it. Now, Dan just died here recently. I have a picture of him.

RW-N: Now if you did not plan on teaching home economics, did you have any plans to do anything special with that?

VC: Well, I took home economics because it was ~~two-fold~~.

BJC: At first, she said she wanted to major in uh, business administration.

VC: Yeah, that's what-, yeah, that's right, sure did. I wanted business-, I thought I was gonna get to take-. . . . What I really wanted to major in was business (RW-N: was business), mmm-hmm. That's what I wanted.

RW-N: And, and why didn't-, you didn't do that for what reason?

VC: The reason, because it didn't train me for more than one thing. I could take home economics, and I could take business, I could take some business, some other time. I did start trying to take a class one summer, but I didn't get through with it. I did try but I didn't get it in.

AB: So you were doing some, some career planning in a sense (VC: Yeah, oh, yeah, yeah, see, I was always-) for yourself. If this doesn't work, this will work, (VC: This would work, that's right, that's right.) you were trying to figure out.

VC: That's right. And I prayed about it, too, I prayed. God hears prayers.

AB: So, now, you were showing us-, we were looking at a picture that you have on the wall of, you said the Club 13? (VC: Yeah) Would you tell us a little bit about that club please?

VC: That was, that was-, all of us were teachers, or the outstanding people there. I can give you the names. (AB: That was in Williamson?). That was in Williamson at that time. Did you know a Miss Thompson? There's Miss Thompson. And there's [name inaudible], still living, about the only one still living. (BJC: Yeah, and you) Gertrude; Gertrude's still living there. (BJC: Oh!) Bring it down here, Bob.

AB: So, this was just a social....a social group? [short verbal exchanges when VC asks BJC to get the photograph of Club 13 women]

VC: Oh, no, no, no, I was looking at the one where I was sitting down. Was that it?

AB: No, this one right here with the ladies dressed up in their, in their evening dresses.

VC: That, that bottom one, that was the one she wanted, wanted that one.

AB: Now was that just a social club of women?

VC: Club 13? Yeah, uh-huh. (AB: And uh) We gave, we would give parties.

AB: And there were thirteen members of-, is that why you called it Club 13?

BJC: There were only nine members there.

VC: I know, but they called...

BJC: I thought that's the bridge club.

VC: No, it-, we, we, most of us were bridge players, too. Let's see here. Get this-. Oh, you come around this way. [verbal exchanges regarding movement to look at the photo of Club 13 members]

RW-N: Okay, we're looking at the picture of the Club 13.

VC: I've still got that little dress, and the little [inaudible] that's on the side there. [chuckle]

AB: Mrs. Clarke was pointing to herself. She's standing on the end of the semi-circle of ladies who are dressed up in formal dresses, some of them are floor length and others are sort of cocktail length dresses. But they're obviously wearing corsages and, uh, dressed for a formal party.

VC: Mmm-hmm. Now, this is Miss Hambrick; she hasn't been. . . . This is Ms. ^{Whittico}Widico; she's

still living. She's living in Williamson now. She was married to Dr. ^{Whittico}Widico; Bell ^{Whittico}Widico. Uh,

this is Miss Thompson. Anna; Anna's still here, I guess, I don't ever see her anymore. (AB:

She's speaking of Anna Starling, who moved to Huntington with her husband) Anna Starling, uh-

huh. And this is Ed's sister; that's Louise Smith. (AB: That's Ed Starling's sister, Louise Smith)

This lady's still living; she's a doll, too. That's Mrs. . . . what's her name now? (BJC: Craft)

Craft. She used to be Miss Majors. But after her children were all grown and gone, she got her

another husband, still living in Williamson. She was a Craft now. This girl is dead. This girl is

dead. This is Lee Ethel. (BJC: Yeah, she was my first teacher) Yes, Lee Ethel was your teacher.

And Ruth...Ruth...Allen. She was Ruth Allen.

AB: So in-, when you came to Williamson, in Williamson, you pretty much had to make your own social life? (VC: Oh, yeah, well, yes) And you did that....

VC: And we did a nice-, we did a pretty good job of it back there. And we even, we even, we'd get together and we had plays and had people come to see; we'd take parts in plays. I know I was supposed to be old foolish girl [inaudible], I just did crazy things. [chuckles]

AB: So you did-, was that a part of the school, that you did that, or was that a community activity?

VC: No, that's a, we just organized. Yeah, it was part of the school, in a sense. Because we just got together, trying to do something else besides just teaching all the time. And we worked together. And some of the men were in some of our plays. And we would give plays and make money off of it. Keep our clubs going.

RW-N: Now, were the students in that?

VC: No, we didn't have the students in it. (RW-N: No, yeah)

AB: That was an adult activity.

VC: Uh-huh, adult activity. And then we would, at that time, whenever we wanted to give a party, we would just get permission, we would have it at the school. And we would have-, and sometimes we would have officers to come, towards the end, we would have somebody up there, in case something-, because it was kind of off to itself, you know. But we, we,-I thought we did a nice job.

AB: So, now, you came to, came back to Williamson, you set up the home economics department, you began to teach, and then you met this gentleman, who became your husband.

(VC: He was a dentist there.) Had you known him before?

VC: Yeah, he was just Dr. Clarke to me because he married Madie. Madie was teaching there. He married Madie, but she died at childbirth, her first child.

RW-N: So, Mr. Clarke, or Dr. Clarke, when you first knew him, was married to a woman who was a teacher?

VC: No, he wasn't, when I first knew him. He was a dentist downtown. And uh, he had an office and so forth. Because he had to build his practice, and, you know, so of course, didn't many of us, you know, use dentists at that time unless you had to.

BJC: And he was-, it was 1927, he came to uh, (VC: We came there at the same time, yes, to Williamson).

AB: Uh, was he in school at Williamson, too? Was he...[overlapping voices]

BJC: He graduated in 1925 from Meharry. (VC: Uh-huh. Yeah).

AB: So he came to Williamson to set up his dental practice?

VC: He-, yeah, but he, he started in Yeager. (AB: Mmm-hmm) That's where he started.

RW-N: What's Yeager?

AB: Yeager's a community in McDowell County. Miner community-, mining community in McDowell County.

BJC: Yeah, and it was on the news this morning, too.

VC: Was it?

BJC: That's the one where they found-, they stole all the money, \$17 left in the treasury.

(AB: Oh, yes, I remember that) Yeah.

AB: So, he set up a practice in Yeager, and after a couple of years transferred over to Williamson, to open a practice, a dental practice?

VC: Yes, uh-huh. I think Dr. ^{Whitico} ~~Widico~~ got him down there. Because at the time, uh, he, Cleo-, did you know Cleo King? (AB: No) She, she was in McDowell. Ah, she was the music teacher for

the whole county. (AB: Uh-huh) Everybody knew Cleo. She was a...what was her name?

[chuckles] But she was a, was a doll. He was, he was in-, that was Dr. ^{Whittico's} ~~Widico's~~ niece. And I think Dr. ^{Whittico} ~~Widico~~ was trying to put that in line for his niece, you know, to have somebody. And I think that's how he got Clarke down there. I think that's the way it was. Because he started out in, in McDowell, see, in Yeager, see.

AB: So when Dr. Clarke's wife passed, after that you and he began to see each other?

VC: Well, we were good friends. Madie and myself were good friends. Because when I came to teach, when I came back to teach, because I didn't know her when I went away to school. She wasn't there, but she came while I was gone. But, I don't think she was; I often wonder about that. Maybe she was there part of the time. I didn't, I didn't know her until after I came back to Williamson.

RW-N: And she was teaching there then?

VC: Uh-huh, yes, she was the music teacher there, a sweet person.

RW-N: And what is-, what was her name?

VC: Madie Cessom. (RW-N: Can you spell that?) M-a-d-i-e, with just one—Madie. Cessom.

(AB: C-e-s-s-u-m?) -o-m-. She has a sister. Her sister's living in Cleveland. She's been here to see us. I have the picture some place here, Bob.

RW-N: And you said then that this lady, the first wife, died in childbirth?

VC: Yes, she wasn't able to have...

RW-N: And you have her picture here in your home?

VC: Mmm-hmm, and we were good friends.

AB: So, what year did you and Mr. Clarke, or Dr. Clarke, get married, then?

VC: When did I get married, Bob?

BJC: Forty-two, honey. [VC laughing]

AB: So you married in (RW-N: Married in 1942) in 1942.

VC: Uh-huh.

AB: And uh, after you married you did not teach again?

VC: I didn't teach, no, I didn't teach. I taught eight years.

AB: Lovely lady. (VC: Sweet too) I'm looking at a picture of Dr. Clarke's first wife.

VC: Her people, her sister's been here, and her husband. I ought to check with those people to see what's happened to them.

RW-N: Now did Dr. Clarke have children when you married him?

VC: He had one daughter. But that was from another...(RW-N: A previous marriage?)...yeah, I guess you would say. Where's Joel; that's Joel.

RW-N: And how old was she?

VC: How old is Joel?

BJC: She's ten years older than me. (RW-N: So, she was a...child) I'll be 54, so she's 64.

AB: Was she in Williamson?

VC: Who?

AB: The, uh, . . . Joel.

VC: Oh, yeah. But she's, her mother left there. Her mother...well, she and Clarke didn't meet eye to eye, see. So she took the child and married somebody else and went to New-, her people went to New York, and that's where she, and she taught in New York, didn't she? Didn't Geneva teach there? (BJC: Mmm-hmm) Cause we, we went up to see her, to see Joel, and

Geneva. Geneva's over there on the picture standing up over me, in high school.

AB: So you and Dr. Clarke married in 1942, and he continued to practice (VC: Yeah) in Williamson.

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm, he had a good practice.

AB: Uh-huh. And he practiced there, for, I guess, through for the rest of his professional life?

(VC: Yes, mmm-hmm) In Williamson. And uh, we were talking earlier about the, the black medical association. He was a member of that, uh, (VC: Oh, yeah) association.

VC: Yeah, we even had them; they met in Williamson. They met around, see, the different places, in Bluefield, they met in Charleston, most times, and Williamson. Those were the three people.

Because the medical, all three, they weren't separate, the dental.

AB: So you had doctors, they had medical doctors, you had dentists, and you had pharmacists, and maybe nurses who were a member of that organization.

VC: Yeah, I think so, I think so.

RW-N: And this was a West Virginia organization?

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm.

AB: And when you traveled, where did you stay when you went into a community for one of those meetings?

VC: Well, we usually had to, had to find someone to stay with. Because just like we, we were setting up for the meeting, we went around and got places in homes, different homes, that you could stay in, like that. And I can remember when we did it a lot, because we kept them, you know. And uh, [chuckle] that made me think about once when the, when the, the dentists, they met down there, the men go down on Third and have a big time and too late to find any place to

stay or something. But anyway, they went back and told their wives that they wouldn't get 'em any place, and they had to sleep on tables, but they were down there fooling around. [chuckling]

AB: So this was the day before there were hotels (VC: Yeah) that black people could stay in, so you would have to stay with friends or something.

VC: Uh-huh. But, yeah, they used to do that. And then in the end, because I know Clarke was the first person that tried to get the hotel. He got the hotels for the people who would stay there. And most of the time they didn't want to go in, in the beginning, you know, they kind of shied away from; they'd still rather stay in the homes, you know.

AB: When, when you came into a community to have those meetings, were the meetings held in churches or, or where?

VC: Down at the hotel. Clarke always got a place; we met at the hotel.

AB: And what, do you remember any-, what would those meetings be about? What did they talk about at those meetings?

VC: Oh, yes, they, they, I think they were a great help to one another. How, how, how they did different-, like the dentist, they would work together, and they would have their meeting together. And then they would have where all, everybody, because I remember being there and I remember Dr. Gunn was there once because his-, most of the time they didn't bring their wives with them anyway, you know. And some of 'em, well, they didn't much want to come to Williamson or something. And told their wives, you know, some kind of excuse, I guess.

AB: So, they were-, they would actually talk about professional things (VC: Yeah, they did), how, how-, they were talking about improving themselves [inaudible: overlapping voices].

VC: That's right; they had some good meetings too. Cause a lot of times, see, they were-, they

Whittico

would have a-, Dr. ~~Widice~~ was a medical doctor. He was a good doctor, too. But he was just a little radical. But he was a good doctor; he was a good doctor. And uh, and uh, Clarke would-, and they would have the meetings up at the office, cause we built the office-, Clarke, uh, to get off of Third. Because a lot of people, he had a lot of people who liked to come, but they didn't want to go down on Third. So after we were married, we built the office. And they had a pressing shop downstairs, and the office was upstairs. And with all the extra rooms; had a nice office. It's still there, the building is. It sold-, we sold all of that stuff out though.

AB: And what did the wives do while the men were in meetings?

VC: Well, when they, when they did come, but the husbands gave some kind of excuse about they didn't have no-, cause, I know, when Higgenbotham or someone said, "You don't have no place to stay." They said they had to sleep [inaudible] but they didn't want their wives to come, because they ran around down there. [laughing] But anyway, uh, they would stay, we would get places with-, Jess Carter from over in, over in, uh, Logan and... Jess and Clarke were close friends, and they both were dentists, you see. And they-, and Clarke had patients from over there, too. He had a lot of patients from over there. Uh, but Clarke was a mover; he just got along with everybody. Those people loved him in Williamson. He just had a way with people, and, and he always acted that he's known 'em, you know, color didn't make any difference. And those people really loved him down there.

AB: Did he have white patients?

VC: That's what I'm talking about, the white patients. (BJC: That's supported him.) That was his-, that's who supported him. [chuckle] We couldn't have made it just off of. . . and he made, he had a good practice.

AB: Was it the white patients who didn't want to come on Third, you said?

VC: I think so, I think that's why....

AB: And so that's why he built a building elsewhere?

VC: Mmm-hmm, yeah.

AB: Third, I guess, was in the midst of the black neighborhood?

VC: That's right, mmm-hmm. And the black, used to have black businesses—joints we called 'em. You know Bob Harrison has a joint down there, [inaudible: overlapping voices naming businesses]

RW-N: Now you refer to your husband as Clarke. (VC: Uh-huh)

VC: His name was Hannibal. His-, a lady called him "Hannibal!"

RW-N: It was Hannibal? His first name was Hannibal?

VC: Hannibal. But a lady called him Hannibal; she could call it so nice. But I just called him Clarke.

BJC: Here's the what-cha-call-it, if you want to show it to them.

VC: What?

BJC: The Clarke chain. (VC: Oh, no, they don't want to see that.)

AB: What's that, the Clarke family? Where was he from, Mr. Clarke?

VC: Chatham, Virginia.

AB: He was from Chatham, Virginia?

VC: "I'm a Chunook; I was born in Canada." [laughing] He would say he was a Chunook, he was born in Canada, but no, he was born in Chatham. So my guest up here is from Chatham; that's up there now. [VC is referring to house guests in the upstairs part of her home]

AB: So he was born in Chatham and he went to Meharry (VC: mmm-hmm) to take his dental degree. Where did he do college? At Virginia State?

VC: You know, there was a time that you didn't have to, 'cause you had to have so much college. But he went, he went to a place up in, what was that place up in Canada?

BJC: Ferris. (VC: Ferris; that's where he took it.) Not Canada, uh, Georg-, Michigan. (VC: Michigan, yeah, that's Ferris, okay).

AB: So he did undergraduate at Michigan and then he went to Meharry for medical school.

VC: Yeah, that's what he did.

BJC: No, dental school.

AB: I meant to say dental school, for dental school.

RW-N: And how much older was he than you? A handful of years?

VC: Not too many. (BJC: Ten, wasn't it?) Yeah. (BJC: Ten years older) Yeah, yeah.

AB: So he was born in 1900?

BJC: No, uh, 1999-, 1899. (AB: 1899, uh-huh)

VC: That's right. That's when he really was born, he said he was born.

AB: Did he ever tell you why he chose Williamson to set up his practice? I mean, not Williamson-, West Virginia. What brought him to West Virginia?

VC: Dr. ^{Whittico}Widico.

AB: Dr. ^{Whittico}Widico? (RW-N: Yes) And he was trying...well, see, there was Cleo, I asked you if you knew Cleo. (RW-N: Yes) Dr. ^{Whittico}Widico was trying to get him in the family, professionally.

They wanted, he wanted Cleo to marry a professional. And there wasn't much chance of a professional, you know, back in that time. And I think, I really think he fell out with Clarke

because he didn't marry Cleo. He, he broke the engagement. Dr. ^{Whittico}~~Widico~~ went up to tell-. . Miss ^{Whittico}~~Widico~~, the one that told me that though. That uh, he broke the engagement himself and [inaudible]. [chuckling] But Cleo was, oh, she was a doll, she was a sweet person.

RW-N: So you ended up marrying a professional man. When you thought about marrying—how old were you when you married?

VC: Pretty old. [laughing]

AB: You married in 1942, you would have been thirty-two when you married, born in 1910.

RW-N: And had, had you been wanting to get married, or it didn't matter? Or did you just want to marry a professional man?

VC: No, there's a long story there. Forget it. [all laughing] I'll tell you all about...

RW-N: What parts of that business are you willing to tell us? [laughter]

BJC: They had a long courtship.

VC: I, I had a secret marriage. That's what the part I didn't want to-, in college, when I was in college.

RW-N: And you don't, and you don't have-, you don't have to talk about things you don't want to talk about. (VC: That's right) Okay, so, uh, but, I guess what I really am trying to get is: did you have a sense of wanting to marry a particular kind of man? A man who had made something of himself, a professional man? Or did you just-, did you want to marry for love? Did you have much sense of that?

VC: I married for love, I married for love. Married for love. That was the part I didn't want to tell. [laughing]

RW-N: Okay. [chuckling]

AB: Did you have a big wedding? Where did you-, when you and Dr. Clarke married, where did you....?

VC: No, we didn't have a big wedding. (BJC: They married at Eliza's) At Eliza's house, with the preacher there, the people I was living with. Oh, they were dolls. People have been-, so I look back at how good people are. That's good people, you know. I've had some good friends and good people, people who have saved me, I guess you would say.

AB: Now, when you went back to Williamson and began to teach, did you live with your father and stepmother?

VC: For awhile. Dan was living there, too. We were living in a little, uh, apartment, and it was a little crowded. And I-, it's a long story, but uh, Dan's mother was-, and my father, were living with us, and it caused a kind of a friction, the crowding or something. So I moved out. And then Dan did. Then, Dan, when he married Peet, and she was teaching then and came back. They came back. Uh, that was one of the little, little things that kind of hurt, I said. Those are some of the things...when Dan married Peet, she was an English teacher there, she didn't want my, my, my-, Dan's mother and my stepfather, to stay there with them. And she maneuvered to get them out. Sometimes those things come back home to roost.

AB: Most of the time.

VC: Yeah. [chuckling] So they had to get out. And Miss Lizzie, Dan's mother, was very hurt over it. And uh, finally they both, Dan left Williamson and Peet left Williamson. And they, they had, let's see, Peet just uh, Dan just died here about two months ago?

BJC: Mmm-hmm.

VC: I've got the picture there and everything about them there. And they had three nice

children.

AB: So did your father live in Williamson until he died?

VC: Yes. No, he didn't, he died in Detroit. He died in Detroit. (BJC: Oh yeah, Grandpa died in Detroit) Uh-huh, yeah.

AB: So, he left Williamson...

VC: Yeah, yeah, mmm-hmm. After Miss Lizzie died and all of that, he left Williamson. Of course, he and Miss Lizzie stayed together; they didn't ever part. I think I'm right about that, but she...

BJC: And while whatcha-call-her was taking care of him after he started getting blind, wasn't she?

VC: Who?

BJC: Uh, (VC: Gussie?) Gussie.

VC: His sister, yeah. Yeah, I've been up, I've been up, we went up a couple of times to see him. We went up to his funeral, didn't we?

VC: Mmm-hmm.

BJC: And I went with you, didn't I?

VC: No.

AB: Uh, did you feel loved when you were growing up?

VC: Yeah, my mother loved me. (AB: Your mother loved you.) Yeah. I, my daddy said he. . . I always thought he didn't do like love should do, I guess you would say. But my Mother. My mother died with me, she had diabet-, she was a diabetic. How long has Mom been dead? She hasn't been dead so long. (BJC: Well...) [Inaudible] a long time.

AB: But you, you don't feel that you had a deprived childhood or so, even though you had to work to help yourself? (VC: Oh, no, no) You didn't feel deprived?

VC: No, no, nobody. . . And Daddy did the best...

BJC: .. was really faithful to Grandma because Willie and Minnie wouldn't take care of Grandma (VC: When she got sick) to give Mama a rest.

VC: So I had to take care of her.

AB: Could we...if we could back up for a moment, uh, I'd like to ask you about World War II. You were living in Williamson when World War II took place. [overlapping voices-inaudible] You were married; the war started in 1941 in December. And you married in 1942. (VC: Uh-huh) Uh, do you remember anything about the war years, the impact it had on you, or so?

VC: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I, uh, I taught those classes in Williamson. (AB: What classes?) For those teachers. You know they had home ec teachers. (BJC: Oh yeah, the uh...) What do they call those classes? [inaudible; overlapping voices] They had something...you had to teach some things about how to...eat and foods and so forth because the government paid me. (BJC: Yeah, Bernice and...) Cause I, I did. . .but I dreamed about that.

AB: Were these young people or, or adults?

VC: Old people, adults. Most people were from [inaudible].

BJC: You know, the thing that was with the 4-H, the Department of Agriculture.

VC: I finished my classes with that, the, the day I married. I went to-, I had my last class, which I wish I could think of the word—it was a-, the government, uh, taught-, I taught home ec class, taught it down in the electric—where was that? (BJC: Power Company) Power company, yes.

RW-N: That was related to the war in some way?

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm.

BJC: I'm trying to think of the word. It was part of the Agriculture Department. Uh...

AB: Was this the Extension Service? (BJC: That's, that's it) Was this run by West Virginia State?

VC: Yeah...I don't know whether it was run by West Virginia State. Now, they did some of that. That was since I was married that they, they sent somebody to do something for West Virginia State.

BJC: It was definitely related to the Department of Agriculture.

VC: Yeah, the government was teaching-, had-, because I got paid for it. (AB: Mmm-hmm) Because I remember the funny thing-, it's a strange, strange thing. I, I had dreamed about it, down at the Appalachian Power Company, they had a room where they, they had different meetings and things in it; I taught. I had dreams about that once, that I, that I was teaching this class. And when went, I said, "Here I stand in the place I dreamed about."

AB: So you taught nutrition, sort of, courses that [inaudible]

VC: Oh, yes, the government, the government, gave the material and stuff I had to go by. (AB: Uh-huh) And, and the people ate it up. They loved it.

AB: And these were adults that you were teaching? (VC: Oh, yeah) Were they all black?

VC: Yeah.

AB: They were all black adults that you were teaching. (VC: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh) Do you remember anything else about the war? Did you know anybody who was in the service? Uh...

VC: Let's see, if we could hit upon something that will make me remember.

AB: Do you remember rationing? That...

VC: Yeah! Yeah, oh, yeah, yeah. And I was teaching by that time because the government fed people, and I had to take that-, when I first started teaching, there was some, Miss, Miss uh...what's that lady's name? Garnett's mother. (BJC: Oh uh...not Tate) Garnett's mother. Garnett was a teacher. [tape recorder beeping]

AB: But you, you remember food rationing during the war uh,...

RW-N: Food stamps....

AB: Food stamps...(VC: Oh, yeah) all of that.

VC: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah, we used 'em. We had to. And I had, and I had to, and I had over in this place...I, I became a real improviser. I went to West Virginia-, I went to Ohio State two summers there, to teach how. . . . Do you know, it handicapped me; I can do better improvising. [laughing]

AB: Well, when you were running that cafeteria, (VC: Uh-huh) during the war years, uh, how did you manage to plan and, and do food for the children when you worked?

VC: Well, you know, I had...regular...the government gave us that, and then I had two women who did that part of it, Miss uh, Garnett's mother, what was her name?

END TAPE 2 - SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2 - SIDE 2

VC: I had to work with those people. I had to be, I had to make out this...

AB: This is tape two with Mrs. Verona Clarke in Huntington, West Virginia, August 11th, 1997.

[VC and BJC talking briefly about extraneous matters] Uh, so, you were talking about World War II and uh, the special things that you had to do as a teacher, uh, at that time, with the youngsters that you were working with. What about, uh, in town? Do you remember anything

else about the war? Did-, was there anything special that you all were teaching the kids in school about the war, what was happening, or anything like that?

VC: Dan, somebody else taught something concerning that, because Dan Acker taught some of it and Dan Palmer, too.

BJC: But see, back in '42, '42, you quit in '43. (RW-N: Yes, mmm-hmm) So she didn't have...

AB: ...a lot of experience with that.

VC: You do help, Bobbie Jean; I sure am glad I have you.

RW-N: Yeah, what-, maybe this would probably be a good time to stop, right? I mean, we, we need to talk to you, but we probably need to come back and talk to you some other time.

VC: See, I got guests came in besides.

RW-N: And besides, you've been talking a long time now, and I know it's....so why don't we.....

END TAPE 2 – SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 3 – SIDE 1

AB: I'm at the home of Mrs. Verona Clarke in Huntington, West Virginia. Today is August 14th, 1997. We're talking with Mrs. Clarke and her daughter, ^{Barbara} Bobbie-Jean Clarke. Rita Wicks-Nelson and Ancella Bickley. So should we start then with the years after integration at Williamson High School?

BJC: Or with integration.

AB: Or with integration. Could you tell us about that, Mrs. Clarke?

VC: What is there to tell? I wasn't teaching then.

BJC: No, no, no. We want you to tell about- well, tell them about me going to school in general. Or you can start back with the 7th grade, if you want to, I mean, 6th grade, if you want

to tell them about my grade school years. Or you can go ahead and start with integration in 1956 at Williamson High School. Because of the...

AB: Well, I'll tell you what let's do. You uh, you married Mr. Clarke, Dr. Clarke, (VC: Mmm-hmm, dentist) and you were teaching when you married him. (VC: Mmm-hmm) And did you teach at all after your marriage?

VC: Yes, I taught, I taught until after Bobbie Jean was born, yeah.

AB: So, you taught a couple of years after you were married?

VC: Mmm-hmm.

AB: And why did you stop teaching?

VC: Uh...I really stopped because of—that was after you were born when I stopped [meaning BJC]—because I stopped really because in getting someone to stay and look after her it would be cheaper for me to stay home with what they would charge you. You remember Miss uh...what's that lady's name? Miss McQuiny's step-...

BJC: Oh, Miss Alison?

VC: No, no, it wasn't Miss Alison. I forget her name. Anyway, they, they charge you for-, if Clarke was making good, and then I'm teaching, they would charge me-, I wouldn't be making anything, according to what they would charge you. And then, then they wouldn't do-, now, Miss, Miss, what was that lady's name? Oh, Miss McQuiny's stepmother, I don't remember what her name..... But anyway, that was one of the reasons why. Then uh, I taught until after Bobbie Jean was born and then I decided it would be cheaper just to, uh, where you pay somebody to stay there and take care of your child and you, you, and the difference-. I even worked it out, and the difference would be very little, I would be making very little. So, I just decided-, and he said,

"Do whatever you want to."

RW-N: So that was your decision, more or less.

VC: That was my decision.

BJC: Or their decision, really. They agreed on it.

VC: Uh-huh.

AB: Is that the way you reached most of the decisions in the family, that you all talked it over and came to a joint decision?

VC: Yeah, uh-huh.

AB: He didn't make any without you, and you didn't make any without him?

VC: I don't know whether he didn't make any without me. [laughing] But he had me fooled.

You ever hear of Dr. ^{Whitico} ~~Widice~~ up there, yeah.

AB: Were you tempted to go back to work at all after Bobbie Jean got of school age?

VC: Un-un, I didn't even try. But I, you know, we always had-, you can see all these pictures and things I kept of us. They all [inaudible] keep up my memory. Somebody said, "Why do you have all these pictures for?" I said, "To keep up your memory." It really does help, it does help to have pictures.

AB: So, when Bobbie Jean started school, she started at Liberty?

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm.

AB: Did she graduate from Liberty?

VC: No, after integration she graduated from Williamson High School.

AB: How long did she go to Liberty? How many years?

VC: How many years, Bobbie Jean?

BJC: Oh, eight, eight years all together. Because the first six years was the grade school, and then it was only two years at the junior high school, seventh and eighth grade, and at the ninth grade, 1956, (VC: Yeah, that's right) then we went to the high school level, because integration just opened up in Mingo County. And I was with the first bunch. It was, uh, what was it, ^{'58}~~five of~~ ~~or so?~~ ~~was it~~ something like that, when it started...integration. And we had some complications.

Because the first thing, I was trying to be in extracurricular activities. And uh, some of the things, ^{remember} well, I ~~know~~ Miss Gen-, uh, Miss, uh, ^{...}~~Miss uh~~, oh,...June Gentile wanted to, didn't want to let me in the business curriculum. Momma got in there and spoke up, and wanted to know, "Now, why don't you want her to be in...?"

AB: Tell me about that. (VC: What?) About uh, how, how it was when they wouldn't let Bobbie Jean in these classes. What did you do?

VC: Uh, I went over there and spoke to uh, what was her name? (BJC: June Gentile) And uh, I just, we were just frank together because they all knew Clarke, and uh, he was very well liked, you know. ^{if that} ~~And~~ so, any time, if they ~~thought they~~ were pleasing him, they, they would come on over. So uh, when she started talking to me-, and I just told her, just told her off about the things, and she agreed with me, and we didn't have much trouble.

RW-N: Why were they not letting Bobbie Jean in?

VC: In the business? (RW-N Yes) Well, a lot of people from that business course, uh, they got jobs. It was easy for you to get a job, you know, when you finish high school. So many of those kids really...that's where they stopped, after they finished high school. And they had a good-, pretty good training. They had a very good training there. And uh, because uh, when, after integration June Glover, was her name, she, she taught-, she and (AB: June Gentile) June got to

be the best of friends. And everything turned out real well.

RW-N: So, did they believe that Bobbie Jean would be better off in another curriculum?

VC: Well, it was, it was real popular, for one thing. Because you were able to-, when you finished high school and you had taken that course, you could get jobs easier.

AB: Do you think they were telling her that she could not go in because she was black?

VC: I think so. I think it was cause Gen-, uh, June and myself, we just talked it over. I said, "June, what do you mean by that?" "Well, I don't mean anything." We just knew one another, you know. So, well, I just stood up [inaudible], so they had to let her in, you know.

BJC: And also, I got closer to June. And one thing I definitely remember, Miss Gentile was in charge of the school yearbook. Bobbi got in there and worked with the yearbook. Then, in my senior year, I ended up as editor of the school yearbook. So, Bobbi spoke up, too. [chuckling]

AB: What about other black kids who did not have parents perhaps as outspoken as you were about your daughter? Did they have a hard time in that school?

VC: Not that I know of.

BJC: Un-un, not, because Eppie when in.

VC: Yeah, Eppie was-, right on the bat she went into [inaudible]. She was...

BJC: And some more people. But after, I think, they [inaudible] told, "Now, listen, you're not gonna keep us out," and let 'em know that they're gonna have to let us in.

VC: That was a very, very, very good course, and it was good because so many of those kids went right to...

BJC: And they even let us, the kids, work some in the summer time. Because if you had good enough grades like in the 10th or 11th grade. And especially-, I mean, 11th grade, and definitely

if you could type, you could get jobs downtown, and maybe just working as a recorder or something like that. But some of 'em definitely got grades right out of high school, because we took (VC: Got jobs) shorthand and typing and then uh, they even had a bookkeeping course.

AB: What about, uh, social life in uh, the school after integration?

[a brief break in recording]

RW-N: We asked about social life in the school after integration.

VC: The kids got along fine. I thought they did well overall. And uh, but when it come to social activities, how was the social activities?

BJC: It was pretty good, but, uh, I didn't have that much personally. I went to the prom and everything, but I didn't have a whole lot because I [inaudible] for one thing, because of my health and because of the fact that I was fat, I didn't have a whole lot of boyfriends, like some people.

VC: [chuckling] But they, they did all right with it. But did they, did the kids all mingle together? You know, they would go out to the field house, is where they used ...

BJC: Yeah, uh-huh. And I have a picture that's first [inaudible], first, uh...

VC: I, I thought they got along quite well.

AB: What about you? What was your social life in, in, uh, Williamson?

VC: Oh, we had Club 13. You see all those pictures of us? Yes. [chuckling] And then uh....

RW-N: And Club 13 was a social club?

VC: Yes, it was a social club.

RW-N: And I think we've talked about that.

BJC: And the Deltas. Cause I even—no, not the Deltas—(VC: no, not the Deltas) the bridge club.

VC: That Club 13; see that Club 13 over there? (RW-N: Yes) [chuckling] You saw Club 13.

BJC: And the bridge club. (RW-N: And what else...?) They played bridge.

VC: And we had bridge, yeah, we had a Bridge Club. We played, uh, you had your different times; just a group of us played together. But we never did uh, well, a lot of times we were invited to a lot of different things that they would have. Like once I know when Governor, uh, Moore? Moore was up there. Cause somewhere we should have that picture here somewhere. Well, we, we attended that, because we were invited to some of the social clubs, too. But it was never, you know, everybody knew one another. You didn't go to the fullest, but you [inaudible]. And we, we knew everybody; we didn't have much trouble at all.

AB: Uh, what about traveling outside of Williamson? Did you, uh, have much interaction with people outside of, of your own community?

VC: Well... (BJC: Here, talk about vacation if you want to, next.) Whacha mean? Well, I can just look at the pictures there and show you the different things that we, we did as uh... see this picture right here. [showing pictures to AB and RW-N]

RW-N: We have to stay near the tapes, though. (VC: Oh, I'm sorry)

AB: Mrs. Clarke is taking one of her pictures down for us.

VC: That's Club 13. Right there, and so I think that's a nice picture. [inaudible]

BJC: No, that's uh the Federated Women, because Anna's on there. Anna wasn't in no Club 13.

(VC: Wasn't she?) No. (RW-N: I think we saw Club 13.)

AB: This is Anna. So, what was Federated Women?

VC: It was...

AB: Is that a woman's club?

VC: Uh-huh, it was a woman's club.

AB: And was that a Williamson based women's club?

BJC: No, it was national, it was the United Negro uh, Colored Clubs, or something like that.

VC: No, this, this is Club 13, Bob.

BJC: Now, Momma, Club 13 was back there. (AB: Yes, we saw that.) Now, Anna was on this one. So, this is the Federated Women, because you see, (VC: Oh, yes, Lorena Straw) cause Lorena was the first president.

VC: She was, that's right. [Inaudible] forgettin'. [chuckling]

AB: This, uh, tell me a little bit about the Federated Women's Club, because I don't know that we've talked with anybody who was a member of anything like that.

VC: Sure enough?

AB: Mmm-hmm, So, tell me about this club.

VC: Uh, this-, just a group of women got together and decided we were gonna have-, it was more like a social club. But we did all these things. This was just, this was a special meeting. And they had the uh, they had the pictures taken, because this was a new house we [inaudible] we built up there.

AB: You mean you built a club house?

VC: No, a house. (AB: Oh, your home...) (BJC: Her home) (AB: Oh, this was your home, I see) Yes, this was in my home.

AB: So this meeting was at your home, and uh...

VC: We had the pictures, they said-, we got ready for the pictures, they said, "Let's go," you know, "have pictures at Verona's house." And I had more room, too, because...

AB: Well, everybody certainly looks lovely. These ladies are all dressed up. (VC: Mmm-hmm)
Uh, did you have a meal when you came together? (VC: Oh, yeah) Did you have lunch or something?

VC: Oh, yeah, we always had the-, even when we played...like a group of the retired teachers, we just played bridge every Wednesday, (AB: Mmm-hmm) we would have, we would eat, you know, it was enjoyable.

AB: Well, this, this woman's club, then, was a local group, but you had national connections?
(VC: Yes, mmm-hmm) The Federated Women's Club. And did you meet monthly?

VC: I think it was monthly, up, up to a certain time. When school was out everybody dispersed, you know, went their different ways, because we had people like Miss McQuiny, way back there, that went to school, summer school, a lot of teachers went to summer school about that...in, in the summer time. And I can name you these people off.... Now, she's still living. That's me.
[showing pictures] She's still living. This girl is still living. She's living. Uh, Bernice Lomax is still living. This girl is still living. This, this is the oldest one of 'em is still living. And she was down here in the hospital.

AB: So, you, you were a member of the Bridge club. You were a member of the Federated Woman's Club, uh, you-, what about parent-teacher kinds of things? Parent-Teacher Association.

VC: They, they had them. We, we attended those too. Because, see, after Bobbie Jean was born
When did I stop teaching, Bob?
I didn't, I didn't teach long. ~~I stopped teaching about [inaudible]~~

BJC: You said you stopped teaching after I was born, so that was 1943. You didn't teach in the fall of '43. (VC: Mmm-mmm, I didn't)

RW-N: So, those years you were busy, uh, being a mother (VC: Mmm-hmm), uh...

VC: Going to clubs, running to Huntington all the time.

RW-N: Running to Huntington all the time.

VC: Yeah. [chuckling]

RW-N: Uh, did you have help in the house? Did you have any help in the house during those years, (VC: Yes, Uh-huh, yes) yourself? And at one time you were busy building a new house?

(VC: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm) Busy, I suppose, decorating and settling in. (VC: Mmm-hmm)

BJC: Yeah, we built High Street, we moved into High Street August of 1952.

RW-N: Your new house.

VC: Mmm-hmm. And this is where, this, this is the place where we had the picture made.

Everybody wanted to come to the new house, you know how people are.

RW-N: Did you travel much?

VC: Yeah, we traveled. We did, we did-, every-, we uh, I was just thinking about it. We used to go to Atlanta, I went to Atlanta as a delegate to a sorority one year. And I went to uh, Cincinnati one year, because Clarke had a brother in Cincinnati. Yeah, we did a lot of traveling. And most of the time-, [inaudible]. Well, Clarke and myself, we took a European trip to uh-, Clarke, just Clarke and myself took a European tour.

BJC: Well, most of all, I think you and I remember the NDA, when he was still active as a dentist, we went to different cities and different locations, because of the...

RW-N: Now, what's the NDA? The National...

BJC: The National Dental Association.

RW-N: ...Dental Association.

BJC: It was the black-, all-black dental association up to a certain point. See, that was before

real integration. (RW-N: Yes) Because we had to stay at people's homes and everything, when we would go to these cities. Mmm-hmm.

AB: And uh, you were a member of the state medical association and traveled. (VC: Mmm-hmm)
Now, you showed me a picture of the women's auxiliary of that association. Would you tell me what the Women's Auxiliary was and what they did?

RW-N: Now, this was the state dental association?

AB: No, it was the medical...

RW-N: Medical, oh yes, the larger one.

VC: All together. We finally, we finally had one where just the dentists would meet, didn't we?

BJC: Yes, but that was the, uh, esthetic club. (VC: Oh yes) That was the... (VC: the esthetic club, yeah)

VC: Yeah, we had the pictures of all that stuff.

AB: What did the Woman's Auxiliary of the Medical Society do?

VC: We met. [chuckling]

AB: It was a social gathering?

VC: Yeah.

BJC: It was mostly social for that particular thing, they didn't try to do anything.

VC: Uh-huh, but we, we also-, but, no, we-, because here's a picture of...

AB: I saw that picture of...

BJC: [Identifying photos of women but names unclear]

VC: See all these people. And who is living in that group, Bob, beside me? [chuckling]

BJC: Bell ^{Whittico} ~~Widico~~...

VC: And who else? Miss Howard is gone. This is me, this is Miss Howard, this girl is Jac-,
Jacsul or Jackson, in Charleston.

AB: We're looking at a picture of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Medical Association. Do you
have any idea what year this picture might have been taken?

VC: Mmm-mm, mmm-mm.

AB: This probably would have been in the '50's somewhere. (BJC: Yeah, should have been)
Somewhere in the '50's.

BJC: Somewhere in the '50's, cause I was still at home and everything, and I remember going
with the group. Because I usually traveled with the [inaudible] but this was taken in the middle of
the summer, so I was with them but. ... I might have, I might not have...

AB: So the men would come together and, and they would have their sessions and the women
then would have the sessions as well. Uh, you mentioned a study group. What was the study
group?

VC: That was just the dental, the dental men of West Virginia, the men.

BJC: Well, not West Virginia, because you have to remember Dr. Boston from, you know...

VC: Yeah, Dr. Boston was in there.

BJC: And he was from Kentucky.

VC: Mmm-hmm. That was the only person though that was from out of state, though, that
belonged to it.

BJC: Yeah. But it was a local group that I think Daddy—what was Charles; Charles B. Payne
study club.

VC: That was, that was just the dentists that got together on that.

BJC: Some dentist, there was some dentist that they named it after. I never did [inaudible].

AB: So the dentists, then, came together in this group to-, you said-, called it a study club. So they were looking at what, new techniques in dentistry, (VC: That's right) and what not?

VC: Though they met here, the doctor that lived here...what was his name?

AB: Dr. Gunn?

VC: No, Dr. Gunn belonged to it, too, but it wasn't as old as him.

AB: Adams? (VC: No, no, not...) Henry?

BJC: Elliot, Dr. Elliot.

VC: Yeah, Dr. Elliott.

AB: Mmm-hmm, he was a member of this group as well.

VC: Mmm-hmm, yeah. I was trying to see if I didn't have something like that.

BJC: You couldn't find a picture of them. (VC: That's Club 13 over there.) The only picture I found was Daddy graduating from uh...that was the dentist that was still living in 19-, I think '50 or '55, at the National Dental Association. That's the only think I could find. I couldn't find any with just the uh...

VC: Yeah, we would, we would go to Roanoke, remember, go to Roanoke with ...

BJC: Yeah, that was the National Dental Association.

VC: No, that wasn't, uh, national. (BJC: It wasn't?) Mmm-mm. I've forgotten what that was.

RW-N: So your husband was involved in a variety of (VC: Yes) medical, dental, and also other community kinds of activities?

VC: Yes, yes, yeah, he was real busy.

BJC: And most of all, Daddy did other things, but he was a Shriner as well. And he was active

in Alpha Phi Alpha, and we went to different national conventions for that.

VC: You, did you go to them?

AB: No, I did not.

VC: Uh-huh, you were too young. [laughing] I was trying to see....there's Clarke up there. His brother-, those two set of men with the -, one of the-, one on this side is Maceo, his brother.

Now, he's uh, he's dead, too. All three of those boys are dead. Men. [chuckling] Well uh, that's Maceo, was the one, he was a medical doctor. And uh, but Clarke and Walter....oh, I have a picture of Walter.

RW-N: So your husband had several brothers?

VC: Two, two other brothers; there was three of them.

RW-N: Two brothers. And Mrs. Clarke has been, uh, referring to a wall of pictures of her husband and his family. And also there are many plaques on the wall, uh, some of them that tell us about his medical training and other kinds of community activities that he has been involved with.

AB: Uh, I noticed that you uh, there are a number of things on your wall that, uh, are related to Marshall University. When did you make a connection with Marshall?

VC: Well, when we first moved, along when we first moved in here. Because-, did I belong to anything before that? I know we came down here.

BJC: I found some information. I think it was in '93 or '94 that you-, see, it was '95 that you made-, set up the, uh, set up the, uh, scholarship in Daddy's name. And after that we...

VC: Yeah...we did that since we've been here. (BJC: Yeah) (AB: Uh-huh)

BJC: And we started doing even more then, after that. But, things leading up to, uh, now, I

would like for her to tell you about when [inaudible] going to conventions, now these were the things that were our vacations, but also the chance to travel. Now, also, she became a Link, and that was in what, '55? (VC: Yeah, I think it was when they sent me[inaudible]) But she became a Delta, she said in '49, I think.

AB: Uh, did you-, you become a Delta, you joined the grad chapter in, uh, where, here in Huntington or in, uh, Williamson?

VC: This is where-, we set it up here in Huntington. (AB: Mmm-hmm) I remember that because we went out here to uh...where was it? The children's home or something? (AB: Yes, [inaudible])

BJC: But Charleston set it up for you, the Institute of Charleston set-, initiated the chapter.

VC: Yeah, but our first meeting was here.

AB: Uh-huh. So you have gone to national Delta conventions? (VC: Yes) And Link conventions? (VC: Yes) And your husband went to Alpha Phi Alpha, that was his fraternity, conventions. And you went to the National Dental Association conventions. So you had a lot of traveling done (VC: Mmm-hmm, that's right) outside of West Virginia.

VC: Yeah, we even-, just, just Clarke and myself, we took a tour of one of those, you know, all tours that you could pick out your own tours out of ... [chuckle] In Europe, we took a European tour one year.

AB: Did your husband retire?

VC: Yeah, he finally retired, didn't he, Bob? (BC: Mmm-hmm) Because uh, who took over the office then?

BC: Dr. [inaudible name].

VC: Dr. [inaudible name, same as above], that's right.

AB: How old was he when he retired?

VC: He wouldn't like for me to tell you that. [laughing]

AB: All right, you don't have to. Uh, did he uh, have much time after he retired before he passed?

VC: Oh, yeah, yeah, he had, we had a long time.

AB: So he had a good many years (VC: Yes, mm-hmm) then, when he was in good health and continued to uh...

VC: Clarke, Clarke was 89 when he died, wasn't he, Bob?

BJC: Uh, no. Well, yes, cause he wasn't gonna be 8-, he was 88 really when he-, 89 cause it was in 1989. Yeah, and he would have been 90 that fall. Yeah.

VC: Yeah, we had a good life, though. We just, we did a lot of travel.

RW-N: He died in 1989, (VC: '89) did you say? (VC: Mmm-hmm) So you had many, many years with him [inaudible]. (VC: Oh yeah)

AB: How long were you married, all told?

VC: It was coming up to the 47th year. He died in May and we, we were married in June. We would have been-, I was looking-, I was going to slip it on, -couldn't plan it cause he didn't want you ever to have anything [chuckling] unless he had it there, because he'd have people to come to the house when they had meetings, men, you know, different ones.

RW-N: And, and you were living in Williamson at the time? (VC: Williamson, yeah, mmm-hmm) And then...

VC: I would never been in Bluefield if he was still-, I mean, in Williamson, I mean, Huntington if he was still living. (RW-N: Here, uh-huh) He wouldn't leave Williamson for nothing.

RW-N: And Bobbie Jean was living where at that time?

VC: Uh, in, when he-, well, Bobbie Jean lived in Chicago for a while. After she finished-, after she finished school.

RW-N: So Bobbie Jean, were you living in Chicago (BJC: Yes, I was) when your father passed?

BJC: No, no. I came back to West Virginia. (RW-N: No, you had come home, uh-huh) I only stayed in Chicago in exactly about 20 years. (RW-N: Uh-huh) Because I went up there in 1967, uh, because of my health, and also because they had better things in relation to my health and I got a job in my field. I was in marketing. [Inaudible] had me have business administration, and went into marketing. I worked for [inaudible]; that was ^{the organization} [inaudible]. And I got along fine with the people, and they were able to help me in my health problems. And well, she may want to go into that, because my health problems was one major thing also after they got sick. And he, she started having some eye trouble. I came back to West Virginia.

RW-N: So you returned to West Virginia in, you have written down here, in 1987. (BJC: mmm-hmm) And did you live with your mother and father then, when you came back?

BJC: Yes, mmmm-hmm.

RW-N: And so then, after your husband passed, Mrs. Clarke, you two decided to purchase a home in Huntington, move to Huntington?

VC: Yes. See, we visited, you know, a lot here. I belonged to organizations here before, when he was living.

RW-N: What brought you to Huntington say more than Charleston? What were your connections?

VC: Closer, I guess. [laughing] (RW-N: Excuse me?) I guess it was closer.

RW-N: It was closer? (VC: Mmm-hmm) So you got connected here?

BJC: Well, it was two-, it was several things. Well, see, go back to originally to Mary Hairston, because that's how you knew so many people here.

VC: Yes, I happened to know a lot of people. Mary Hairston, uh, was a teacher there when I finished. See, I finished high school in Williamson, Liberty High School. And then I went to-, I finished in Bluefield and, uh, I, I, home ec, I worked [inaudible due to noise from microphone] ..didn't get to finish—see, I had to work my way through. If I didn't get to finish, I would still have some training in how to carry out a home; I worked it out that way myself because [inaudible].

BJC: But most of all, after you were-, you and Daddy, are still living-, you came to Huntington, like after the-, when you first went into the Deltas, it was the Logan/Mingo group of the Deltas. (VC: Yeah, that's right) And then the Deltas had so many people to die or leave West Virginia, they had to merge with this Huntington chapter.

RW-N: So you just got connected up a long time ago.

AB: So, so Mary Hairston was a friend of yours in Williamson.

VC: Yes, uh-huh. She was teaching there when I was going to school there. (AB: Mmm-hmm) See, when I finished, they started opening up this home ec department, that's what I was doing. And I happened to get it over Bernice... Lomax? (AB: Mmm-hmm)...over-, she was up for the job. But I got it because I finished in the state, and she took hers out of the state.

AB: So, did uh, Mary Hairston then live in Huntington, or just have friends here or what?

VC: She just had friends...Lucy McGee, did you...?

AB: Yeah, oh, yeah.

VC: Yeah, well, that was her best friend. I stayed at Lucy's house plenty of time.

AB: Okay. So she would come back and forth from Williamson to Huntington, and you would come with her. (VC: I would drive her; I was her chauffeur.) And you got to meet people here so then you had lots of friends. (VC: That's right) And then after the Deltas merged and you became a member of the Deltas here, you had that group, too, that you were a part of-, is that-, in Huntington.

VC: The Deltas, no, the Deltas...

BJC: The Deltas, originally.

VC: [inaudible] I was still living in Williamson.

BJC: Originally, it was with Logan/Mingo. That was really her first active chapter. Because Charleston initiated chapter [inaudible].

RW-N: It sounds from what you say, then, that you drove an automobile (VC: Yeah) for a long time. How old were you? (VC: Huh?) How old were you when you [inaudible]?

VC: Oh, I learned to drive when I was 13. I guess was 13.

RW-N: When you were 13. That's in 1923.

VC: That was in North Carolina, see.

RW-N: Uh...there weren't very any automobiles even in 1923, were there? Seems like you got in on it very early on...and you were driving.

VC: Yeah, well, before, because I used to drive Mary Hairston down here. And I even went with them. I didn't do all the driving. We went out to uh, where was it? Hot Springs or some place out there.

RW-N: And you're still driving today?

VC: Yeah, I'm still driving.

AB: Let's back up for a moment, if we may. You talked about going to Bluefield in home economics. (VC: Mm-hmm) And, because you knew that even if you didn't get a chance to finish four years you would have something. Were you planning on getting married and operating your own home then, or were you thinking that you would use your training to work? What was your attitude?

VC: I knew it would be ^{two-fold} ~~too full~~. My mother was, was a very good cook and I've always wanted to be like my mother. My mother died with me. See, she was at my house when she died.

AB: But did you-, was getting married one of your goals in life?

VC: Not necessarily so. Well, I guess it was, too. Because of...there was different-, yes, I guess it was.

AB: So that, uh, so when you were studying home economics, and you had, as you said, a two-fold kind of aim, either you'd get a job or you'd be able to operate your own home, either way.

VC: Mmm-hmm. That's the way I figured, if I don't get to finish the-, if I-, I figured it like that, I really just figured it out myself. And I said, "Now, if I don't get-, I will have some training that maybe somebody'll want me." That's the way I said it. [laughing]

AB: When somebody would want you...who was the somebody? Were you thinking a job? Or a husband?

VC: I was thinking about a husband, that somebody would want me as a husband-, as a wife. If you can cook. Men thought about that, too, you know, if you could cook. But my mother was a good cook and I guess I wanted to be like my mother.

RW-N: Since we have began to talk about these early days again, would you tell us a little bit

more about your sisters? Now, you did tell us that one sister stayed in Anderson.

VC: No, she stayed at Wilson.

RW-N: No, she stayed in Wilson.

AB: With your grandmother?

VC: Yeah. . . well. . .

RW-N: No?

VC: She was, was. . . yeah, Minnie was the one that stayed with Grandma. Grandma kind of took her, she stayed with Grandma and them most of her life, I think, you know, when she was young.

RW-N: And what, and who. . . and she is still not there, though, right? Where is she now?

VC: One of my sister's is in Wilson, still in Wilson.

AB: Is that Minnie?

VC: Yeah, that's Minnie.

AB: So she never left North Carolina?

VC: Well, we were really born in South Carolina.

AB: Yes, in Anderson.

VC: Mmm-hmm, and came to Wilson. My mother came to Wilson because of work there. And then she had a uncle there who told her about tobacco place, you know. And there were good jobs. You know how. . . migrators are like. . . you remember how they left the South? Went spreading out to different parts of the world?

RW-N: Now your sister who stayed in South Carolina with your grandmother (VC: Yes), what did she eventually do?

VC: Well, they finally-, Grandma and all of them moved to North Carolina when my mother

RW-N: Oh, I see. They all moved to North Carolina. (VC: Mmm-hmm) Did your sisters go to college like you did? (VC: No) Or finish, did they finish high school?

VC: I don't know whether Minnie or Willie, neither one, finish high school. But they were in high school when they. . .they married early on, I guess you would say. Because we, we were planning to go to Williamson this week. (BJC: Wilson) Wilson, I mean, yeah, Wilson, this week. And uh, were you here when that group came in? [Refers to the Clarke's visitors on August 11th]

RW-N & AB: Yeah. [all talking simultaneously] [laughter]

AB: So of your sisters, you were the only college graduate? (VC: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm) Only one who, uh What about their children? Do your sisters have children?

VC: Yeah. James went to, went to West Virginia State. Her, her son went to West Virginia State and finished. And he lives. . .he lives in Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina now. And he had two daughters. Both of those girls are living-, one's in New York and where's the other girl?

BJC: She's still in, in Baltimore, isn't she?

VC: No, no.

BJC: In Balti-. No, she was a graduate of Harvard, wasn't she?

VC: Yeah, the oldest girl, she finished Harvard, James' daughter. Well. . . I guess that's, I guess that's about the best I can explain.

BJC: All right. Do you want to tell them about-, well, still . . .

VC: Well, well, let's see what they want to know about first.

RW-N: I'd like to know one other thing about the, the education thing we that we're talking about. You mentioned going to Ohio State for a couple of summers (VC: Mmm-hmm), and you had a friend who also went and encouraged you to go, perhaps. (VC: Mmm-hmm)

VC: It was my teacher, my teacher. That was her home, Miss Smith. Well, she finally married Mr. Dunlap. But anyway, she said, "Girl, why don't you come on and go, go to summer-, I'm going to summer school this summer. So why don't you come on and go, go with me? You won't have to, you won't have to pay anything."

RW-N: So you lived with her during the time?

VC: Yeah, that summer, just summer school.

RW-N: And what . . . you were earning graduate credits there when you went to summer school?

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Uh, was it necessary for you to do that for your job or. . . ?

VC: No. No, it wasn't. Let's say I just wanted to. It was something to do.

RW-N: Do you remember what kind of courses you took?

VC: Yes. I took that course in, in uh, a course in uh, where you, uh, home economics, where you went out. . . 'cause we took tours into these big wholesale places. We would take tours out in Columbus at the wholesale. I went there two summers. But I said, "Oh, well...", instead of looking for a master's degree, I finally married. [chuckle]

BJC: [inaudible] ..the courses you took, when you said they were uh, cafeteria management.

VC: Yeah, that was the one, I said, because I had to run a cafeteria. That was one thing, reason why I ^{took that} [inaudible]. I took cafeteria management. And I met this girl in Dan-, Dan-, in uh,

Charleston. Because a couple of girls was in summer school up there in Charleston. Josephine ^{Rayford} ~~Rafford~~ was one. Josephine was up there when I was there. And Daniels or McDaniels, or something.

AB: McDaniels. . .Thelma? [Mrs. McDaniel was also interviewed for this project.]

VC: Yeah, she was up there one summer when I was up there. And I had-, my teacher's the one that asked me, said, "Come on and stay with me." Because they, she lived there, she lived there on Wood. . . Woodlawn, what they called Woodlawn. Anyway, but her, and because her brother was-, I think they were trying to get him away, get him to marry somebody else other than the [inaudible] [chuckling] But that didn't work out.

RW-N: You, you taught for a relatively short period of time. But it seemed to be more important to you in some ways, in that the fraternity has been important and you continue to play bridge with the teachers and you've gone to the reunions.

VC: Yeah. And we wen-, and I went with him to dental meetings, national dental meetings. We didn't go to Houston, the year they had it in Houston. But we went to Chicago. . . and...

RW-N: Now very recently you went back to a reunion at Liberty High School?

VC: That was for-, I finished high school there, see. And I taught there when I came back there; I taught there.

RW-N: We should put on the tape that we, uh, viewed a huge collage of photographs that Mrs. Clarke, with the help of her daughter, prepared, uh, going back to the Liberty High School days, including family and many, many other people too. It's a very beautiful piece of work.

VC: That was just last year.

RW-N: That was just last year.

VC: We went back to the Liberty reunion. Oh, it was beautiful, too...that we stayed. . .what was that place, that hotel where we stayed?

BJC: Oh, the Marriot.

VC: No, no, no, no. I'm talking about-, the people running it that, uh...

BJC: Oh, you mean in Huntington?

VC: No, Williamson.

BJC: I mean in Williamson. Let's see, [inaudible] Sycamore, Sycamore Inn.

VC: Sycamore Inn, that's what they called it. [Inaudible] people that we knew and my husband knew real well too, and so we stayed at that hotel. And they had a dining area, too. That was nice. That was just last year, the one we went to last year. Now, what else is there to talk about?

There's a whole lot to talk about but is there-, get your memory all mixed up. [chuckle]

BJC: Okay, you've gotten to-, you mentioned your trips to Hawaii and Europe. Uh, do you want to tell them anything in relation to taking care of Bobbi?

VC: You? [chuckling] (BJC: Mmm-hmm, [inaudible]). Well, well, well, uh, what you mean? Going to New York was when. . . . Well, we just took that [inaudible] a shopping tour when we went to New York that time. Is that what you're talking about?

BJC: Well, no, the first trip, in relation, well, most of all in relation to my health when we talked about. . . . (VC: Ohh, yes)

AB: When did you discover that Bobbi, uh, had a health problem?

VC: Bobbi, how old were you? Just about eleven...

BJC: Just eleven... going into womanhood, that's when it was.

VC: We figured that...she had them when she was a baby, though.

AB: Had seizures?

VC: Mmm-hmm, seizures when she was a baby. (AB: Mmm-hmm) Then she, for long, she didn't have 'em for a time. Then I always worried about, well, somehow I thought, well, when she goes into womanhood, that sometimes that-, someone told me that could happen. And it did happened.

AB: And what did you do? How did you find help for her?

VC: Well, we went to New York. We went to several places.

AB: To clinics and what not, for examinations?

VC: Mmm-hmm. We went, well, when you were a baby. When you first had it, we went to Cincinnati to the children's home there, children's hospital there in Cincinnati. Well, then to lots of places.

AB: And did you find any help for her?

VC: Yes, certainly did, I think so.

BJC: Now. . .

VC: Now, when she, she went to Chicago. . . .

BJC: But 1959 was my first trip to the uh, the uh, 1959. . .the New York trip, because that's when they discovered I had the thyroid condition also. But they began to definitely diagnose the epilepsy and they put me on medication for it, didn't they?

VC: Yeah, they did start that. . .when we went to . . . [inaudible] just traveling.

AB: When Bobbie Jean went to Chicago to live, were you worried about her?

VC: To death. (AB: Were you?) [chuckle] I worried about her all the time, the whole time she was there.

AB: Uh, because of her sickness and (VC: Mmm-hmm) and being at a distance from you? (VC: Uh-huh, Uh-huh) Did you go to visit often?

VC: I went one year in February, didn't I?

BJC: Mmm-hmm. Oh, that was another thing that I didn't put down here. The year Daddy had the, uh, it was called the, uh . . .

VC: The study club?

BJC: No, it wasn't the study club. The thing they made every February for the dentists.

VC: Oh, he would go out there for the dental [inaudible].

BJC: The Chicago Dental Association, I think it was called, and it met every February. But that's where he would go for like fresh-up courses in relation to dentistry.

VC: Mmm-hmm, yes. One year he went to Ann Arbor. So what else. . . what is there else to talk about? [chuckle]

RW-N: You've, you've mentioned, uh, you've gone to a lot of organizations and have a lot of friends. Have you ever had any close white friends?

VC: Oh, yeah.

RW-N: Tell us about that.

VC: One thing, the [inaudible] lady, Miss Hess. We had lots of good friends there.

RW-N: And this was in Williamson . . .

VC: Uh-huh.

RW-N: . . . that you're talking about?

AB: Did you visit back and forth in one another's homes? Have lunch together or anything like that?

VC: Well, sometime, because I remember once, when Miss Hess and her daughter-in-law came up there, I was canning then. [chuckling] I didn't know they were coming. Yeah, we-, and then we would go to different meetings and things. I was just wondering if I had anything here. Well, we went to the meetings, some of the meetings. Yeah. Well, a small place like that, you get to know, everybody know you and you know practically everybody and everybody was friendly.

BJC: And like if you carried something to the post office and you had Daddy's name on it or Momma's name, it could still reach them if it didn't have the right box. (VC: yeah [chuckle]) Cause I remember that.

AB: So people knew you in that community? (VC: Mmm-hmm) Uh, how do you feel about race relations in that, or as it affected you? Because you lived in the deep south almost, in the Carolinas, South Carolina and North Carolina, West Virginia. What's, what's your life impression about racism?

VC: Well, you know, my mother, see, my mother, when we were small, she worked service, you know. And uh, and I remember once we lived so close that . . . those people were just so good to us. Everybody was good to us. I thought everybody was good to us. And everybody knew one another. You could call them by their name, the same, you know, then. Now, that was in South Carolina then, cause I remember, [chuckle] I often remember the little dresses that used to have a little band around here, sometime they were pleated, sometimes they would gather. We would switch 'em this way, switch 'em that way. You know how the kids are. And those are some of the things that was [inaudible] in South Carolina, but my mother left South Carolina and went to Wilson, because she had an uncle up there and told her there was good work for her up there. Well, she worked in homes and she was a very good cook and she was always [inaudible]-, she could always get a job any place she wanted.

AB: So you don't look back on your life and, and feel that white people have been particularly mean and unkind to you? (VC: No, no, huh-huh) And you don't feel that your life has been-, you've been held back because you were a black woman?

VC: No. Well, I'm, I know. . . I don't blame anybody for it. Because if you wanted to, if you set

your mind to do something—you know that—and you just go ahead and try. Just like I went to Bluefield. I didn't have any money. I just went on up there. I made an application to go to school there. I didn't have any money, but I did work that summer and saved some money maybe to have. And I remember when I went back that first semester, when going back to the second semester you had to have a certain amount of money. And I didn't have it. Because at first I had saved up my own money that I had worked for. But when, when, when I went back, and I said, "Well, I guess I'll go back home," when I found out you had to have the money. But the president's wife, Miss Sims, Mrs. Sims, uh, uh, so that I stayed. [tape recorder beeping] I said, "Well, I can go on back." She said, "No, you don't, you stay here, Verona." And I got to know the president's wife real well. I even went to see her when she was much older, when she was in [inaudible] Pennsylvania.

AB: Could, could we go back for a moment to Williamson, during the days of segregation? If you wanted to go to a movie in Williamson, where did you go?

VC: We, we went upstairs.

AB: How did you feel about that? Did it make you angry or...?

VC: Mmm-huh, I didn't bother about it. What will be, will be. [laughing]

AB: Where did you buy your tickets? At the front of the-, on the street, or where?

VC: No, they had in the lobby there, you could go in the lobby then you went to your different places like that.

AB: Did everybody use the same ticket line? White people?

VC: Oh, yeah, mmm-hmm. (BJC: Things were-) People were very nice, come to think about it. People were very nice.

BJC: In my life time, things weren't that bad. And we didn't have like two different bathrooms and all that kind of stuff, especially in West Virginia. See, because West Virginia is. . .now, some people really don't realize this even today, that West Virginia was [inaudible] people that were fighting slavery. That's the reason West Virginia split from Virginia. Because of the, uh, what do you call it? The-, people that, up at Harpers Ferry and so forth. . .

AB: The Confederates?

RW-N: Abolitionists?

VC: Abolitionists, that's it.

BJC: Abolitionists, that's what I want to say. And all that. So West Virginia-, and then because we were right on the edge with Kentucky. We had help from Kentucky, in relation to economics as well as school and friends and all this. Because still now, you hear them talk about south Williamson. Well, south Williamson is really part of Kentucky, but it's part of the economic things that make up the Tug Valley, uh, what do they have now, the King Cat, Nat, uh, the King Coal festival that they have every autumn.

VC: Daddy was a King Coal one year, wasn't he?

BJC: He was in charge of that! (VC: Yeah) Yeah, because we have a picture even of him in red hat and everything. Course that was in relation to the miners. Cause one thing he definitely did, after he became president of the NAACP—because he was president for that twenty years—he worked to see that in relation to that, they would alternate, one year it would be a black miner and one year it would be a white miner. But he saw that they did-, now they didn't have to do much marching or anything. Usually Daddy could talk to the people and break down things. Cause some things where they hadn't hired a black, he was able to represent the NAACP and get them to

hire black kids, if they were willing to. Most of the time he could succeed, sometimes [inaudible] they wouldn't.

AB: Well, do you all feel that as a doctor's family, that your lives were the same as other black people who lived in the community, or different?

VC: Not that much difference. I don't think so. Because let me see, here's a picture. . . up there when I finished high school, that was an all-black school when I was. . . .

END TAPE 3 - SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3 - SIDE 2

AB: Okay. I was asking whether or not you felt that because your husband and Bobbie Jean's father was a, was a medical man, that . . . (BJC: a dental man) . . . dental man, that the opportunities or the, uh, group that you moved with was different than, let's say, as a miner or somebody else in Williamson.

VC: I don't, I don't think there was so much separation of who, by what, where you worked, you know, who you were. But I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the patients he had that were white, see. (AB: Mmm-hmm) His patients were white. Mostly his practice was white. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And uh. . . but it didn't seem, everybody seemed to have been. . . especially I remember that we used to-, well, when Bobbie Jean came back, because she went to the-, she was a Presbyterian so she went to the Presbyterian Church, that's where she joined up because-. But that was this, what we called a white church. But everybody was good to one another.

AB: In, in the beginning days, when you first knew Dr. Clarke, was his. . . his practice white then or did it become largely white after-, in after years?

VC: As far as I can remember back, he was a dentist, and he had more white patients (AB:

Always? From the beginning?) Always, from the beginning.

AB: He never had a fully black. . . .?

VC: And Dr. Whitico[†] was very, very uh, popular, too. But he was a different type of person that Clarke was. Clarke was more of a friendly type, but Dr. Whitico[†] pushed his way through, you know. But I guess it takes everything, you know [inaudible]. I thought they were-, everybody seemed. . . . Dr. Whitico[†]'s practice was mostly white.

RW-N: So you seemed to be saying that in general, uh, you had, have had good relationships with white people? (VC: Yes, mmm-hmm) Uh, but it is also true that your husband was-, belonged to and sometimes was a leader in the NAACP (VC: Yes), so that seems to say to me that there was some recognition (VC: Yeah) that more had to be done for black people. (VC: Mmm-hmm) Is that true?

VC: It's true. I remember he had, uh, had a special meeting, and that's when they all-, we met at First Baptist Church. And we had far more white people there. Because most people, they knew him, see, all up and down those hollows.

BJC: Oh yeah, that was the testimonial dinner. And where's the plaque? Oh, there it is. The plaque that they gave to Daddy. But two of his nephews came from Dayton to present the plaque. And it was presented by the NAACP and the family for the testimonial dinner.

AB: Mmm-hmm. That's for service that he had given to the community in Williamson. [VC and BJC affirming this statement in overlapping voices.]

RW-N: Did you believe, uh, in the goals of Martin Luther King during the civil rights movement?

VC: I think he was right. Sure, I think he was right, because he, he, he. . . he did-, in other words, you don't have to be mad to get what you want, you know. You do it peacefully. And he was

very peaceful. I remember when he had, he had. . .had it at the. . .what was it they called it? We had the...

BJC: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference?

VC: Maybe that was what it was.

BJC: That was the original thing that he was in.

VC: Uh-huh. But I know that they, there were-, the church was full. We had to use our church, the First Baptist Church. And there were far more white people there but.... People are just people, if you would just think about it. And, of course, we weren't afraid to go any place there. We'd go up in these hollows, any place.

AB: Uh, when integration came and Liberty school went out of existence (VC: Mmm-hmm) how did you feel about that?

VC: How did we feel about it? The integration was very smoothly. Remember the yea-, day-, year that all of those kids went over there? All of, a lot of the parents were kind of upset, but the children didn't pay any attention; surely didn't bother [inaudible].

RW-N: Which parents were upset? The black parents? The white parents? Both?

VC: Neither one of them seemed to have been too upset about it. Maybe you had one or two teachers, because what was her name that I talked to? Gentile woman. What's her name?

BJC: Oh, June Gentile.

VC: Gentile, June Gentile.

AB: Did you, did you all feel that you had lost the black community? That the black community had lost something when Liberty ceased to exist?

VC: I don't think so, because they, they, they integ-, I thought they made a very smooth

integration up there. Because you remember June Glover and those people, and they, and they met. I remember going to one of the first meetings. It was friendly and it was both sides were there. And of course, Clarke was always a speaker. And people were just people to him. And a lot of his friends were just people. I'm expecting Jessica by here any time now. I've got to get my income tax straight somehow. [laughing]

RW-N: When you mentioned before that you supported Martin Luther King and you don't see any reason that you don't have to be, you don't have to be angry or mad at this (VC: No, no), do you, do you recall in your life times when you were mad because black people couldn't get as good a jobs or anything else that went on?

VC: You know, I can't say that I was mad, but I often wondered why. I think those were questions. Why did these things have to happen? And I think it's, it's more or less a personal thing. I think if you just pray about it and feel you're right about it, that there were plenty of people felt just like you did. Because I remember they did call Clarke on a-, Uncle Tom, didn't they? [chuckling] They called him because he was just [inaudible]. When he had that meeting, there were far more white people; the church was filled.

RW-N: Who called him Uncle Tom?

VC: Uh, our people.

RW-N: Some of the black people did.

VC: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Because they felt he worked too smoothly with white people?

VC: I don't. . . I don't know. Maybe so, maybe so. But he had a way of getting along with both sides. He didn't get mad with anybody. And, and, and there were. . . uh, I think he did a lot in

letting know that people were people. Everybody's looking at their-. Of course, you can say that, I think, always that you're looking out for your own interests sometime. And when we've learned that you have to look out for your neighbors, that's where that comes from...your neighbor.

AB: Here in Huntington there were big problems with integrating a couple of eating establishments in downtown Huntington. (VC: Yeah) And it was true also in Charleston integrating the Diamond lunch counter, (VC: lunch counters) the department store. Was there anything like that in Williamson?

VC: Yeah. They had, they had some of those troubles, but they didn't seem to have as much trouble. Do you remember anything about any disagreement with it? [directed to BJC] I don't remember.

BJC: Mmm-mmm, I don't remember. It was just, well, I think, more or less the pocketbook was the determining factor there. (VC: Yes) Yeah, cause anybody that had the money or knew the people, they could go ahead and get it. Now, what year did we go into the Mountaineer Hotel?

VC: I know Clarke was one of the first people when we would have our different dental study clubs and, uh, the national study club, in the, in the state. You know, we were organized in the state. Dental and pharmaceutical, doctors, medical doctors, all. We had an organization like that.

And I was trying to see if I had a picture of that anywhere.

RW-N: So are you saying, Bobbie Jean, that, that you think that if people had a certain amount of money or social status, that the doors—black people—that the door gets opened more easily?

(BJC: Yes) Is that what you're saying?

BJC: Mmm-hmm. Well, I think that's the truth of it, as I could see it in the state. Because I can tell the difference even now in some things, that they are willing to accept you more if, as long as

you have the economic status. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) Or if you know somebody that can help you. But in most of the places, ~~if~~ they have ~~not~~ accepted us by now, and I think after integration of the schools, and where people had contact with each other, or after we began working together. Because I think things run smoothly and well at Marshall, for example, but in other things that I've looked at since I've been here in Huntington, and I think they all run pretty smoothly. And I think that after we have gone to school-, because after all, integration began in 50-, in the 50's, I think earlier in Huntington and Charleston than it did in Williamson, didn't it?

AB: I think it started fairly fast in these places.

BJC: And it went pretty well because after going to school together, I think that brought the whole state together more. But still, in some communities, black people did not live or still don't live, like in Wayne County, I think it was only one. . .one couple or one family.

VC: I used to-, the Lindseys or something like that, I used to stop there with Mary Hairston cause I used to drive, I used to drive Mary Hairston down here a lot. That's how I happened to know about her because I used to come down here with Mary Hairston. And I remember, though, when we went in the Deltas, it was [inaudible]. Are you a Delta? [directed to AB] (AB: Mmm-hmm) Are you?! (BJC: Oh, we didn't know that!) I didn't know that. [chuckle]

AB: Fifty years now.

VC: Fifty-, I think I've been there fifty years, too! [laughing]

BJC: Yeah, that will be fifty years this year.

RW-N: So in some ways, uh, from what you have been saying, I get the feeling that you believe that things have gotten better for black people in general? (VC: Mmm-hmm) In general.

VC: Yeah, I think so. But you, one thing, if you don't ask, you don't get, do you? [chuckling]

You have to ask somebody. As, as far as I'm concerned. . . I never have been a prejudiced person. Of course, my mother had, uh, uh, and then of course, my, my, my grandmother, my mother's mother, I think she was pure white. She was white. But Grandpa was black as anybody. And so I think the children, of course, I have a feeling they call them high yellows. [chuckling]

BJC: [inaudible] in my life time.

VC: But, uh, I, I don't have. . . do I have any pictures of [inaudible]?

AB: Was there any, in your lifetime, have you run into any color prejudice among black people, fair-skinned black people? You talk about your grandmother being very fair and your grandfather being darker skinned. Do you run into any kind of inter-group color prejudice?

VC: I haven't. Maybe I have; I don't remember. It didn't make an impression, let's say. Because we've always, I've always had good friends, especially in Williamson. Miss Hess, the [inaudible] people. And uh. . .

AB: But I mean black people against black people. Have you heard black people say ugly things about somebody because of their color or treat them in-, each other in bad ways or so because of color? From one black person to another?

VC: Oh, one black person to another. I really don't. But I know when Clarke had that meeting, they met at First Baptist Church and the church was really filled up. And there were-, of course, there were more white people because they knew him. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And nobody was afraid of one another, and, and it did go very well. They say it went well, very well in Charleston, too.

BJC: But as a whole, I don't think. . .now, because Daddy was, uh, what? got the key to the city. And he was active in other things, because he was on, on the uh. . .(VC: Where's that key? I forgot where the key was. [laughing]) he was on the, uh, housing authority for the city of

Williamson. And he worked with different things. And one thing, see, I haven't mentioned yet. I do want her to definitely tell you about the few times in her life that she was sick. Now, she took care of me, but at one time she had, definitely had trouble with my birth and everything. And she's mentioned some of that. But she had a bleeding ulcer while I was in high school. And I was the lady of the house for that period of time. [chuckles] And that is so, so much, cause I almost caught her that time cause she almost fell out on me. And I said, "Well, that's the only time I can know that I caught Momma." [chuckle] And Daddy said I did okay taking care of the house. So that's one of the few times...

AB: So how long were you sick with the ulcer?

VC: Oh. . . I don't know; I didn't have too much because I had the operation for the ulcer. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

BJC: But now her stomach is still delicate. Some things she'll eat and won't eat because she's afraid of them or still upsetting her stomach.

VC: Well, see, I, that was, home economics was my subject, so I just know, you know, about things like that. And I took that because. . .because I guess of the experience I had when I was growing up, with my mother and how she had worked with people and how well she could cook. (AB: Mmm-hmm) I guess that was the reason why. Because I didn't know whether I would be able to stay at the college or not. And uh, and so during-, when, when the first time I came back to Williamson after going to Bluefield, and when we went back, it was something. We had to go, ^{the summer you} [inaudible] had to go back home or something you didn't have your money for registration and all that kind of stuff. And I said, "Well, I can go to Miss Sims"—the president's wife took an interest in me, Miss Stella Sims. Did you know of her?

BJC: Now you've told us about those things. Also tell them, tell them about-, we want to talk about you being sick now. What was that other thing you had while I was in Chicago? What are they called, gall stones?

VC: Yeah, I had an operation for that.

AB: For gall stones. That used to be a really difficult operation, (VC: Yes) took awhile to recover during that period.

RW-N: So you've had a few times in your life when you had to deal with illnesses, but then you got over those illnesses, right?

VC: Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: And you have to watch your stomach a little bit today. (VC: I don't watch it too much.) Not-, you don't watch it too much. So basically, you've been pretty healthy, except for some certain things?

VC: I guess that's why [inaudible] I worked it out with myself. If I don't get to finish college, I will learn something, you know. That's the way I said. So that's why I went into home economics, because I said I knew it would mean..., and of course, the year that I finish I'll have a job. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

RW-N: I want to ask you something that, that relates to some of the things that I have been reading that have been written by black women. (VC: Mmm-hmm) Uh, some of these authors, uh, describe black women as having really rather a tough time often in life. Because to begin with, they often have to deal with racism, like they haven't been had been able to get the best jobs in the past, at least. And that also, but as a woman, they've also had kind of a heavy burden in life, that they've had to take care of families, they've had to very often work outside of their homes in jobs

that did not pay the best. So they talk as if black women have had kind of a double burden to carry. Some of the burdens of racism, and then, all of the cares of womanhood. How do you feel about that?

VC: I . . I . . I don't . . I didn't run into much of that. I can't help [inaudible] much experience about those things. And I remember though in Bluefield there were some fine women who, uh, they said, you know, made those kind of contacts and so forth. But they were, they were pretty fair themselves, so you couldn't tell the difference sometime and but as far as I know, it wasn't as bad that. . . . I remember when we had a march in, uh-, going back to Williamson. Everybody was making a lot of noise, when you gonna be in that march and whatcha gonna do. Didn't have one bit of trouble. Nobody, but maybe I heard somebody call out something, you know, a bad word or something like that, but it went along smooth. And Clarke was the head of that. And we had two, didn't we? (BJC: Mmm-hmm)

RW-N: Now what kind of march was this?

BJC: Well, the King Coal march.

VC: No, was it called-? No, they called him the King Coal but what was that? What was that march?

AB: That's sort of, sort of a celebration?

VC: No, they-, integration. . .it had, it had something to do with integration.

RW-N: So it, it was a march by black people or people who supported black people?

BJC: No, all the miners, all the miners.

RW-N: The miners. All the miners.

VC: But we had a lot of white people march with them. It wasn't just. . .but someone's tried to,

tried to make it more than that, but there were a lot of people just . . . I guess because they knew Clarke and he did have a good practice.

BJC: But also, we must remember that education—this is one of the thing I think that integration has helped to bring out—that you had to have an education to have a job. Because after all, even in the mines, everything was automation, and you had to have an education to be able to, uh, get a good job, (AB: operator) good job in the mines. And in everything else. But this also because it's [inaudible] so many mines, this is the reason why I believe that people in the state of West Virginia as a whole, have left from the state. Because if they wanted to get a good job, they had to go for a more, uh, They'd go ahead and get the education here and then leave the state. And we know that this was true for everybody.

RW-N: Bobbie Jean, I'm not sure that we, uh, have asked you about your education. Perhaps we have and I have forgotten, but can you summarize that quickly?

BJC: Well, most of all, after I got my-, they were determined that I go to college. Because Mother was ready for me to be a secretary. [chuckling] Or go to secretarial school, ^{that's} ~~was~~ what she was saying to do, because of my health. But, most, most, uh- Daddy was determined for me to get a business, I mean, business, college degree of some kind. He-, because he and Mother had both worked their way through school. He didn't work his way completely, but he still was determined that I have a B.S.

RW-N: And where did you get that?

BJC: I went, well, I first started at Ohio State. Now, Ohio State was too much for a West Virginia graduate. But I also had a black, I mean, a white man, who—the other dentist there, in fact—uh, Steven Banks was a member of my class. We both went to Ohio State, but he punched

out before I did. [chuckling] But they said most of all, we had a weakness in things like English. And that was very true, because we didn't even know what a comma, what do you call it? you write up, uh, (VC: Pronouns and) well, not pronouns, where you write up these, uh, (AB: Thesis?) thesis or a (AB: or term paper or something?) term paper. Not term paper, but it was just a (AB: Essay or something) essay, that's it. We'd have to write, we didn't know anything about it. Our English teachers just hadn't taught us hardly anything. Now I could keep up with the math because I was-, but I think that's how I got into business administration because I had a mathematical ability.

AB: So you left Ohio State then?

BJC: Yes, I punched out of Ohio State.

AB: And where'd you go?

BJC: Then I went to West Virginia State. That's where I got my master's, (AB: Then you finished at West Virginia State) I mean, my degree.

AB: And then you went from there, you went to Chicago?

BJC: Yes. I just wanted to work because I just wanted to work in business. But really I didn't go directly there. First I went into Ohio because of my Uncle Walter being in Cincinnati and Uncle Maceo being in Dayton. So I went to both places to see if I could get a job. But because it hadn't been much education in relation to epilepsy, the epileptic foundation was trying and still is trying to educate people. And I've been learning more ever since I've been an epileptic. But as the people are becoming. . . we are not really, uh, what do you say? The word that you, uh, not delinquent, uh, where we have to have help, like somebody, uh, with their arms cut off or something.

RW-N: Disabled, in some way?

BJC: Disabled. Yeah, we need some help. We need some help. We aren't completely disabled.

(RW-N: Yes, right) All they had to do was, if they knew the type of seizure you had on your job, then they were able to handle, handle you. But I even got a driver's license at first in 19 uh, what...56? I was old, old enough to-, yeah, 16. I was old enough to get a driver's license. But I did-, I didn't drive [VC talking simultaneously; inaudible] yeah, when I did have a wreck. And I hit a stone wall out there on the street going towards the house—not a stone wall, uh, electric pole. But then I got scared, but I never did know for sure whether or not I had a seizure or fell out from an overdose, maybe, of medicine. (RW-N: Yes) But anyway, I thought that was the Lord telling me, "Bobbie Jean, don't you drive no more!" So anyway, I was...

VC: Don't you drive no more. [laughing] Couldn't nobody else could tell you! [laughing]

BJC: But after that, that's just, uh, but that's the reason. And now since we just have an identification card that you get, and they accept it just the same as they would a driver's license. That's what I use, plus the fact, she loves to drive. But that's also why we stay together. Because what happened, really, after her eyes began to get, well, to get, began to have eye trouble, I thought she needed me here. Then Daddy began to get sick some. And I said, well, I uh-, I wasn't getting along with my husband there in Chicago. [VC: chuckling] So I said, "Well, I'm going back down to West Virginia, I'm not going to be staying up here taking care of you." So I said, "I'm gonna go take care of my parents." And that's why I came back to West Virginia in '87. So I know I went to Chicago in '67, and then came back to. . . (AB: Spent twenty years, you were there) Spent twenty years.

RW-N: Mrs. Clarke, let me ask you some kind of-, what I think of as kind of very broad questions. (VC: Mmm-hmm) And I'm gonna ask you to look back on your life in general. What

do you think your greatest accomplishments have been in life—the things that you feel the best about, that you have accomplished?

VC: That I got a good husband! [laughing]

RW-N: You got a good husband, uh-huh.

VC: I wouldn't be here if it wasn't. He was a good, I mean, he was a good, kind person, too, not.... And he wasn't a person that thought because you were a woman, that you couldn't do this and you couldn't do that. He had a lot of confidence in me.

BJC: And I have to give him another-, I have to give you another A+ too. They worked together in different things. But once in awhile, she'd go behind his back, or he wouldn't know about it. And she might do some-, cause what you, you investigated, that's all you did—wanted to get him off Third Avenue. Because back in Williamson, Third Avenue would be the equivalent, let's say, of what Eighth Avenue used to be here. (AB: Used to be in Huntington) So

AB: That's where the dives, the beer joints, (VC: Yeah) what not were.

BJC: So she would try to get off of...she got him off of Third Avenue. And he built a nice office on Logan Street, which was up there [inaudible].

VC: It was near the high school.

BJC: Yeah, going to the high school.

RW-N: So your daughter thinks that you influenced your husband that way. Do you see it that way, too? That you suggested that, too?

VJC: Yeah. He was, he was a kind person.

BJC: And the next thing I think that you did that was everybody was [inaudible] with, you started investigating for the building of the house.

VC: Oh, yeah, yeah.

AB: You decided you were gonna have a new house too? [chuckle]

VC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. If you can't get you out of Williamson, I can get a . . .

AB: Get a better house. [chuckling]

VC: Yeah. Because, see, I had a house and that's where we moved in when we got married. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

BJC: Yeah, 851 [street name inaudible] Street.

RW-N: When you look back on your life are there certain things, though, that you would change? Wish hadn't happened?

VC: Wish that hadn't happened. I, I can look back and glad of some of the changes I did make. [chuckle] Let's say it like that. I was glad of some. Course, I, I was like my grandmother. I believed in prayer. And whatever I brought up, it was answered. I don't know how, but it did. It does.

RW-N: So you sound. . .so you're pretty satisfied right now and accept what has happened in your life? (VC: Mmm-hmm) Where do you see your life in the next years?

VC: I'll, I'll never marry again.

RW-N: You'll never marry again?

VC: No, I'm too old to marry again, in other words. [laughter] So there's no point in marrying anybody, cause, uh, uh, my husband left it so that if I take care of what he left, I can live a long time.

RW-N: You'll have a comfortable life. You do have a comfortable life.

VC: Mmm-hmm. So I say-, I have a boyfriend, though. [laughing] Just, just the word boyfriend,

that's all, Mr. Jenson, he's in the hospital.

RW-N: You have a boyfriend now?

VC: Yeah, Mr. Jenson. We call him our boyfriend. I don't know whether he likes Bobbie Jean better than he does me. [laughing] Mr. Jenson, he's sick in the hospital.

RW-N: And, and what is [↑]his relationship to you? Do you, uh, companion? You go places together? You visit?

VC: Uh-huh, that's about all (RW-N: Uh-huh, yes, uh-huh) Like, uh, when...

BJC: Because I remember, what was it, the Green and White Ball? That was the first thing you all started going out together, that I went out with Maurice Pleasant. And you had Mr. Jenson as your escort. But, uh...

VC: Other than that, it's no. . .I'm just planning to do the best I can, like it is. (RW-N: Uh-huh)

BJC: And there's just not that many men here in [inaudible]. (VC: Anyplace anymore)

AB: So your life here, though, is a happy life?

VC: Yeah, mmm-hmm. Yes, it is.

AB: You all seem to really get along well together.

VC: Yeah, yeah, we . . .

BJC: Well, we try to take care of each other, that's what we say. Or tell everybody. And that's really the truth. Because, but even though my epilepsy has been better controlled than it used to be. But at one time when I- I know I meant to say- that at the time I first got my driver's license, I was only having seizures at night. I didn't have 'em in the daytime. Then, after I went to Ohio State, that doctor there, Dr. Palmer, made the most progress with me because he put my pills on different time periods and everything. And I had to try to take them 12 hours apart or whatever.

But he's made the most progress for me, as far as a neurologist is. But he also was on the faculty at Ohio State and had a private practice. Because even after I transferred to West Virginia State, she would carry me back and forth to Columbus about every, well, about six months or every four months, (VC: mmm-hmm) something like that, for an examination. And sometime he would change medications, but that's when seizures change. They would get, uh, sometime more severe and sometime. . . and one time, I was here in Huntington, they got even worse. Because of that particular medicine he was trying out on me, my local doctor, Dr. McComas. He was trying to get some education. But that's been, so that's why I say to you, that she's taken care of me and I take care of her. [chuckling] (VC: Take care of her old Momma, yeah)

RW-N: Do you have any other questions-, do you have any, uh, anything that you would like to talk about that we-, that hasn't come up yet? Or that we haven't asked about?

VC: What would I ask?

RW-N: Do you have any part of your life that we haven't asked you about that you want to talk about, or any certain kind of topic?

VC: No. I, I, I'm pretty well satisfied with the situation I'm in now if [inaudible].

BJC: Well, you mentioned the reason for our moving to Huntington originally was (VC: Because your doctor was here) because my doctor was here. And also, because she had began to have trouble with her eyes, and because (VC: My doctor was here) there's no transportation and her doctor was here. So we decided-, she suggested, "Let's move to Huntington cause both of my doctors are down there instead of have to travel back and forth." And I say, "I second the motion!" [VC chuckles]

RW-N: So this suits you well now, where you are now. Do you have anything you want to bring

up? [directed to AB]

AB: No, I think we've pretty much. . . . Oh, uh, you were Presbyterian in Williamson. Do you continue with the Presbyterian church here?

BJC: No, because what I did at that time was-, cause he-, they, they'd been trying to make Daddy a Presbyterian, because originally he was a Presbyterian. And his, the family that was here the other day when you all came, they're active, still active Presbyterian. And I also said, "Daddy, I want you to baptize me, get me baptized as a Presbyterian." Because she went to the Baptist church, but in Williamson he was going to the Methodist church. And from going to the Presbyterian church down in Virginia, I got to visit all three, whatcha call it. And once in a while, they even would bring him literature at the office, because they were trying to make him.... But after I came back from Chicago, where I was an active Presbyterian, and I think I chose that church I was in up there because it was in walking distance. I didn't have to-, and I was on the north, living on the north side of Chicago.

AB: Mmm-hmm.

BJC: So I would walk to things. But the people there took care of me and she didn't worry about me as much. (AB: Mmm-hmm) So after I came back, but, because I had enough pull on him I was able to finally get him to join the Presbyterian church, because he was in a Meth-, what they called the AME church- the same [inaudible]. (AB: Mmm-hmm) So after that happened, I was-, he would, we would go to things together. So that meant that I had someone to go. But when we came here, well, I tried to make her Presbyterian, then she said, "Uh-huh, you're going with me. We're going to Baptist." So we had to go together cause we stuck together.

AB: So where do you all go?

VC: First Baptist.

AB: First Baptist. One other thing. The pictures of your husband, Dr. Clarke, and his brothers, were all three of them in the medical field?

BJC: No, two dentists and one medicine.

AB: Two, two were dentists and one-, were there-, just the three of them? Were there any sisters in the family?

[Name may be Cleo.]

VC: Yeah, Aunt [Cleo. Aunt Cleo-, the children that came here the other day.

AB: So they all went to Meharry, these three brothers went to Meharry?

VC: Clarke went first. He was the youngest of them, but after Clarke was successful, Maceo and Walter both. . . , uh, Maceo went medical. (AB: Uh-huh) The one that's with Clarke is medical.

[Probably refers to Clarke and Maceo together in a photo] Now, they just had one sister and those kids that came in the other day, they were her, her children. (BJC: They're my first cousins.)

AB: That's unusual that-, I mean, how could they afford to send three men in the family to medical school, to dental and medical school? Did they work their way...

VC: They, they didn't go, uh,... I think so. They didn't go to the same-, Clarke was the first—he was the youngest of the boys. And after he had his, it inspired them. And they, they, they uh, well, Maceo was the only one that went to-, you know you didn't always have to go to college then. Maceo went to college. He went to Howard, didn't he? (BJC: Mmm-hmm) He went to Howard. And so he went into medical. Walter and Clarke would kind of work there, because they would go up in, uh, where's that, where did they. . . ?

BJC: Ferris, they went to Ferris. (VC: Up in Canada) They worked in Canada, didn't they?

VC: Uh-huh. They would go up there in the summer and make their money and come back to

college. That's how they got...

AB: How did they make the connection with Canada? I mean, that's not like just going next door. That's a long way away.

VC: Well, see, well, they both-, all, all three of the boys went to Hampton. That's where they went to-, what they called college part first. Uh, Maceo was the only one that finished his-, he got a degree but the other two, the dentists, they went to school up Ferris. I didn't know-, Maceo even went to Ferris before they went into Meharry. Clarke went to Ferris, uh, and Walter, those-, they went to-, but Maceo went to Howard. He got a degree and then went—that's why he went into medicine, I guess, he had a better foundation for taking medicine. But Clarke was the first one of them [inaudible]. He, he, he's the one that went into dentistry. He was practicing before they decided, well, maybe they would go, you know.

BJC: And Aunt Cleo was the oldest of the group. Cause we finally found out down there in Virginia, we finally found the old uh, old Bible. Because see, they didn't have actual birth certificates during that day. And we found that Aunt Cleo was the oldest of the group. She was born in '86...'85, then Uncle Walter was born in '87, and, no it was '86...'88, '89.... (VC: Uh-huh) But anyway, [inaudible] and Daddy was the youngest, he was born in '89. So. . .

VC: He's the one, he's the one that inspired, he went off, because he worked at-, he went to school and got his foundation at Ferris. That's up in Canada, isn't it?

BJC: No, it's in the northern Michigan. (VC: Oh yeah, Michigan, that's right) But the thing that inspired them, I think, Grandpa Clarke, their daddy, while his wife, after his wife, Daddy's mother had died so early, pretty soon after he was born, because Aunt Cleo raised them. He was in Canada working, what they called the Canada railroad.

VC: Yeah, yeah, they worked up there.

AB: Oh, he was a railroad worker and that's how they made it.

BJC: And they accepted the black man better and he was working and had a good job. Oh, and he was really [inaudible] after all the boys got their jobs and started working, he was the proudest man in the world.

VC: Grandpa, oh yeah. [chuckle] He'd brag; he'd brag.

AB: Well, that's something to brag about. (VC: Yeah) [tape interruption] Mrs. Clarke, we were talking about your name and how you, how you got your name.

VC: Oh, well uh, I think, they told me that Aunt Laura-, I'm my mother's oldest child. And when, when they-, and she found it in a book, Verona. And then they said, "Give her another name: Bertha." I never did use the other one: Magnolia. I never would use it.

AB: So your name is Verona Magnolia?

VC: Uh, uh, Verona, I think Bertha was first, but I switched that around. Bertha Verona Magnolia. I picked out Verona. [laughing] Kept it up. Of course, they did, too. But you know people used to give children all those funny names.

[microphone interruption]

VC: I know my mother went from South Carolina to North Carolina because she had an uncle up there was telling her about the good work she could get. That's how, and that's-, I think that's how people. . . I didn't know I had that picture.

AB: Uh, I'm looking at the picture of the lady in the nun's habit. This was your husband's daughter. (VC: Mmm-hmm) And did she grow up in Williamson?

VC: No, she-, where, where did Jo^{el}_^ grow up?

BJC: In New York City.

VC: Yeah, yeah, because Geneva and them went to New York. [inaudible]

BJC: And that's the reason she...

VC: She was in Charleston.

BJC: But see that's the reason that she was influenced because she was going to catholic high school. (VC: Yes, and...) That's how she got-, cause she went to-, that's the first time I met Joel too, was when we went up there for Joel's graduation. (VC: Oh yeah, we went. From high school) And I remember, I was out of the room; they put me out of the room. They were in there fussing [VC laughing] about-, Joel wanted to go in the nunnery right away after high school graduation. (VC: Cause she went to catholic school) But Daddy said, "Uh-huh, you're going to have a bachelor's degree." So he brought her to West Virginia, so he wouldn't be paying out-of-state costs-, prices. So she finished West Virginia State. And she's ten years older than that. That plaque over there with the state of West Virginia, I think, is from Joel.

VC: Now that's Joel right there.

BJC: And that picture's Joel; she's been...

END OF INTERVIEWS